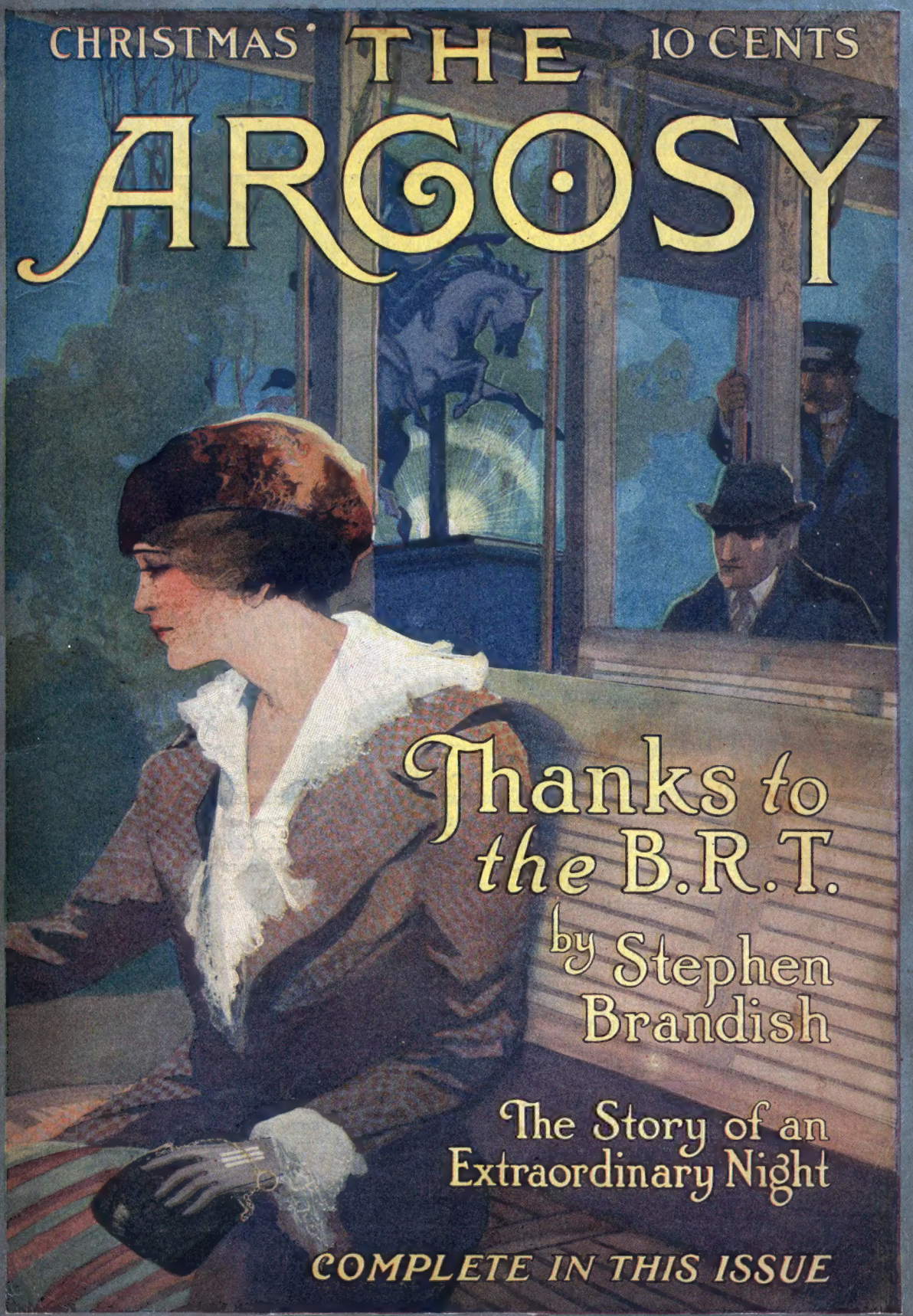
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THE
10 CENTS
ARGOSY
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by Stephen Brandish
The Story of an Extraordinary Night
COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

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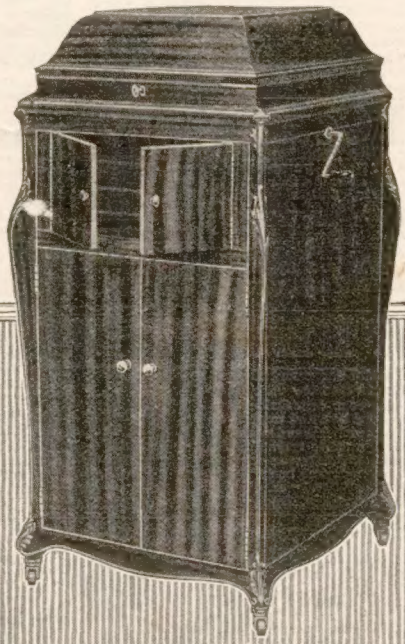

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THE ARGOSY

CONTENTS FOR DECEMBER, 1916

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ONE COMPLETE NOVEL

THANKS TO THE B. R. T. ..... STEPHEN BRANDISH 1
CHAPTERS I–XX

FOUR SERIAL STORIES

THE GILDED TRAP ..... GEORGE M. A. CAIN 61
CHAPTERS I–VI
DARING THE DANGER ZONE. Part II ..... NORCROSS FORBES 92
CHAPTERS V–VII (with Synopsis)
THE MOTIVE. Part III ..... LAWRENCE PERRY 129
CHAPTERS IX–XIII (with Synopsis)
HIS ISLE OF REFUGE. Part V ..... FRED C. SMALE 163
CHAPTERS XXI–XXIV

SIX SHORT STORIES

WHEN NEW YORK ROCKED ..... KEENE THOMPSON 57
A CHRISTMAS MENACE ..... HELEN A. HOLDEN 83
THE BRUTE, THE LADY, AND I ..... EDWIN C. DICKENSON 107
REINDEER ON THE ROOF ..... JOSEPH IVERS LAWRENCE 147
BABES ON BROADWAY ..... BEN DUNCAN 170
THE SEARCH FOR SALLIE ..... NEIL MORAN 178
THE LOG-BOOK ..... THE EDITOR 188

IN JANUARY

there'll be the first half of a two-part story describing what happened to a multimillionaire when his doctor told him he must leave town on pain of death if he remained. Also

"Southwest of the Law"
BY REX PARSON
A thrilling complete novel of life and love in a South American jungle

"And She Took Me In"
BY MAUD SPRINGER NESOM
If our readers want love stories, here's one hot off the bat, from a new writer

"Some Dog"
BY WILLIAM ALFRED COREY
A tale of man's best friend, with a wonderful "kick" at the finish

The foregoing is only a hint of the good things that will make the first ARGOSY of 1917 notable. Don't forget to get it Friday, December 15

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 8 West Fortieth Street, New York, and Temple House, Temple Avenue, E. C., London
FRANK A. MUNSEY, President RICHARD H. TITHERINGTON, Secretary CHRISTOPHER H. POPE, Treasurer
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Munsey's Magazine	$2.00	Special Combination Line Rate $4.49 Less 3% cash discount.
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Railroad Man's Magazine	.80	
All-Story Weekly	.60	
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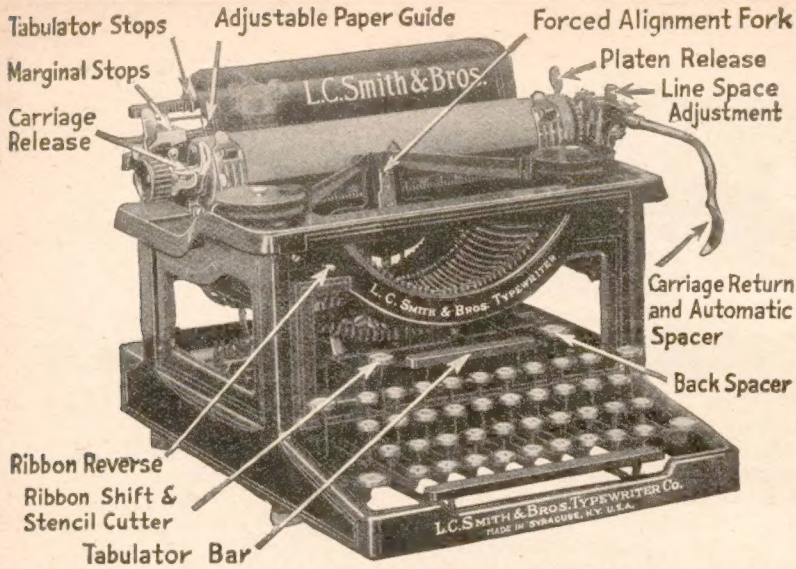

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THE ARGOSY

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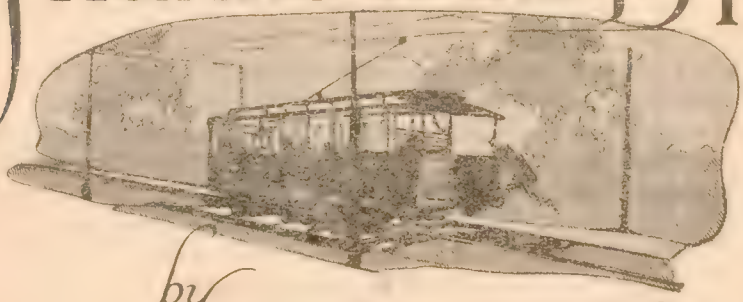


by Stephen Brandish

Author of "His Mad Move on the Movies," "The Name of Martin Hoffman," etc.

COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.

CHAPTER I.

THE PRACTISE THAT WAS NOT.

"HE'S dead!" said the boy on the roller-skates.

"*What?*" cried Dr. James Bowen.

Hardly one second ago, as he turned the corner into McDonough Street and paused to ask his way, he had been whistling undignified satisfaction with the world at large; but now, very briefly, his eyes grew round and thunderstruck, and his color faded a little—and the dramatic effect was not lost on the child.

"Yep! He's dead, mister!" he repeated, with some relish.

James Bowen, M. D., laughed suddenly and drew a long breath.

"Not this Dr. Rimborne, kid," he said as he moved along.

"I tell you the Doc Rimborne that lived here on the block—"

"It isn't the same Dr. Rimborne, boy," Dr. Bowen persisted impatiently. "I had a letter from this one day before yesterday."

Queer, though, that two medical men of the same unusual name should have lived in the same neighborhood! And Dr. Bowen, by the way, hoped that his good old Dr. Rimborne lived on a block as prosperous as this one; because if he behaved himself the neighborhood was likely to mean a good deal to Dr. Bowen these next eight or ten years.

Big, broad houses of this type held families of size and solid means, and—

as he glanced up at the numbers, Dr. Bowen's smile vanished again and even more swiftly than before. Dr. Bowen, in fact, stopped short and emitted a noisy little gasp.

For there *was* Dr. Rimborne's number, and the little brass sign bore the name of Peter Rimborne, M. D.—and every shade in the house was tightly drawn, and beside the door hung a length of black crape and a trail of white flowers!

Full half a minute Dr. Jim Bowen stood perfectly still, staring at the doleful sight and permitting his startled brain to grope around wildly for an explanation that would leave Dr. Rimborne alive and well.

It was a relative, of course, who had died—although he knew perfectly well that Dr. Rimborne had not a relative in the world now, and that he lived quite alone with his servants.

Dr. Jim Bowen shook his head; the boy on the roller skates had been right after all!

And it meant—well, for the moment he declined to think just what it meant to himself. Dr. Bowen, his lately pleasant grin most effectually dispelled, trudged up the steps of the big four-story home and tapped lightly on the door, and a few seconds later he was murmuring to a frightened-looking maid:

"I am Dr. Bowen."

"A friend of Dr.—Dr. Rimborne's? Yes, sir," the girl sniffed as she admitted him.

Handkerchief pressed to her lips, she motioned toward the shadowy drawing-room, and Dr. Jim Bowen advanced dazedly toward the casket at the far side; and although the girl's emotion overcame her and she wept aloud, Dr. Bowen hardly heard. His own throat was tightening and his eyes were filling, for it was indeed Dr. Peter Rimborne who had passed on.

That fine old face, so peaceful, so splendidly dignified in death, was the face of his father's boyhood friend, Peter. Not for a dozen years had Dr. Jim Bowen looked upon the features, but he remembered the last occasion so well!

Dr. Rimborne and his father had gone to the train with him, when he left to establish himself in practise in Hallas, in the most remote corner of New York State. He had laughed then, and joked with young Jim Bowen about the terrors of the new medical man in the wilds—and now he, and the elder Bowen, too, had gone into the great beyond.

Dr. Jim, as they had called him up in Hallas, turned away suddenly and moved back to the weeping maid.

"When did it happen?" he asked with some difficulty. "I never knew."

"I can't talk about it, sir," the maid choked. "Will you see Mrs. Dunlap, please? She's the housekeeper, sir, and —there she is up-stairs."

Dr. Bowen ascended numbly and permitted the sober-faced, middle-aged woman to usher him into what seemed to be her own sitting-room. Mrs. Dunlap, apparently, had been answering the same questions over and over again, for she said rather mechanically:

"Yes, it's been a great shock to everybody, indeed, sir. It came very suddenly. Night before last poor Dr. Rimborne seemed quite himself in every way, but early yesterday morning he called for me and I saw that he was badly off. There was no hope at all from the first."

"What was the trouble?" Dr. Bowen asked dully.

"Some disease of the heart, sir, that he had been keeping to himself this last ten years. I got Dr. Skilling to him as fast as I could, and he told Dr. Skilling about it. Dr. Skilling had four other doctors here in half an hour, sir, but they could do nothing. He passed away about seven o'clock, quite conscious to the end, and telling us not to worry about a trifling matter like that."

"It sounds like him!"

The housekeeper dabbed at her eyes.

"You were a friend of his, sir?"

"I am Dr. James Bowen," announced the staggered caller.

"Dr. Bowen?" the housekeeper repeated vaguely.

"I was coming here to live, you know!" Dr. Jim said amazedly. "Didn't you know? I gave up my practise up-State, such as it was, and I meant to work with Dr. Rimborne and, eventually, to take over his work when he wished to retire. I was to be Dr. Rimborne's assistant."

Mrs. Dunlap nodded without great concern.

"I remember now, sir," she smiled, with faint apology, "although with all the trouble I had forgotten about you, Dr. Bowen. Dr. Rimborne spoke about your coming, sir, and said he'd have to tell me all about you — I've only been with him for two or three months, you know. Why, it was yesterday, I believe, that he planned to select a room here for you and tell me what was to go in it; and now he's—he's—"

Words failed her. Dr. Bowen nodded gloomily; and be it confessed that not quite all the gloom was born of grief at Dr. Rimborne's actually passing. The best of us have a streak of selfishness, rendered more or less marked by circumstance.

Dr. Jim Bowen, as many up Hallas way could testify, was one of the most unselfish mortals alive; but certain phases of this situation were of acute personal interest to him. Twice he looked at the housekeeper and sought to speak; twice his lips closed, but the third time there did escape him:

"His—er—practise!"

"Dr. Rimborne's?"

"Yes. You see, I—I—"

The housekeeper stared at him.

"It's too bad, sir, if you were planning to work into that," she said coldly.

"Why?"

"Dr. Skilling will have that now, naturally—at least, I should think so. He is just two doors below, you know, and he has been in the neighborhood for nine years or more."

"And he is well liked?"

"You might call him a general favorite, sir," Mrs. Dunlap said heartily. "Everybody knows him, and he has given Dr. Rimborne a hand more than once lately. I'm not sure, of course, but I think that—Dr. Rimborne being advanced in years, and folks not liking to trouble him for night calls and so on—people have been calling in Dr. Skilling for some time when they didn't want to bother him."

She looked steadily at Dr. Jim Bowen, and without a trace of the sympathy of which, more and more every second, he was feeling the need. She was plainly a friend of this Dr. Skilling, and no friend at all of himself.

Ten minutes ago, had he so much as known of her existence, Dr. Bowen would have expected to find himself issuing orders to Mrs. Dunlap in the matter of a week. Just now she had settled his whole case with two dozen words—and their very brief acquaintance, in all probability, was over forever.

Dr. Jim Bowen rose slowly and stiffly and even contrived a wan little smile.

"This is no time to bother about such things, of course," said he. "I'll—make other plans."

The housekeeper, too, had risen.

"It is unfortunate for you, doctor," she said. "Later on, I suppose, if you wish to try it, you'll be able to lease this house from the estate. The two others that are rented on this block bring fifteen hundred a year, I believe, and—"

Something in Dr. Jim Bowen's eye gave her pause. There was that in Dr. Jim Bowen's flitting, ghastly smile that startled Mrs. Dunlap, too—because she had no means of knowing that Dr. Jim Bowen, without a friend in the Borough of Brooklyn, and not more than half a dozen acquaintances in the whole city of New York, was not contemplating fifteen hundred dollar houses that afternoon.

No means at all had Mrs. Dunlap of divining that Dr. Jim Bowen's whole earthly capital, distributed between the lovely morocco wallet which Hallas town-

ship had given him last Christmas in lieu of salary as Board of Health, and the two nickels in his trouser-pockets, was exactly four dollars and ten cents!

CHAPTER II.

INTO THE HEART OF FLATBUSH.

IT occurred to Mrs. Dunlap, indeed, after several awkward seconds, that this Dr. Jim Bowen would have been a poor successor to Dr. Rimborne in any case. He looked dazed and stupid as he stood there, staring at her; and when that brief smile appeared, as it did again, there was even a suggestion that Dr. Bowen might be mentally not quite balanced!

"The services will be held to-morrow at two, doctor," she said.

Dr. Jim Bowen awoke with a start.

"I'll—try to be here," he muttered. "Good afternoon, Mrs. Dunlap, and thank you."

She followed him down-stairs. She waited at the door of the drawing-room as he stepped softly back to the side of the casket for a last, long look at his father's friend. Then, not without a small sigh of relief, Mrs. Dunlap closed the door on Dr. Jim Bowen—and that really gifted and learned medical man stood in the sunshine again, alone with a situation of which the very possibility had never occurred to him!

For he was in a mess now, in good earnest! With trunks and grips and instrument-cases distributed between the baggage-department and the checking-room of the Grand Central Terminal, through which he had entered New York not two hours ago — without even the price of a week's cheap board in his pocket, Dr. James Bowen, at thirty-five, was in a very bad plight indeed.

Inevitably, as he moved slowly down McDonough Street, his mind went back to Hallas and yesterday morning.

He had been very cheerful then, as he stood waiting to take the branch train; cheerful even though not ten dollars remained to him after buying his ticket to New York. He had jested with the Rev. Halliday, Hallas's one minister, a decidedly good fellow of his own age and—well, if one chose to be painfully frank, another professional fizzle.

Dick Halliday had been ministering to souls about Hallas for ten years, and had no hope of escaping; Jim Bowen had been attending bodies for twelve, and was leaving for good, and it was hard for the Rev. Halliday to smile.

"I envy you, Jim," was almost the last thing he had said. "They're good people hereabout, but—"

"But they don't make even enough money to feed themselves," Dr. Jim Bowen recalled saying flatly. "They're a good enough lot, even if they have starved me to death, but— Lord! I'm glad I'm going to something sure and better."

Here the Rev. Halliday had looked earnestly at him.

"It *is* sure, Jim, isn't it? I hope so, for your sake."

And now Dr. Bowen winced queerly as he remembered laughing and saying:

"It's as sure as a gold-bond, Dick! Old Dr. Rimborne's one of the finest and best medical men in Brooklyn, and his practise is enormous. I haven't seen him for years, because I've never been able to afford a trip from this hole to the city; but he was dad's good friend, even after he failed in business and everybody went back on him; and I've been waiting five good years to have him suggest that I come down and take hold with him—and hardly daring to hope that he'd ever do it.

"But the thing is sure, my boy. And when I'm well settled down there," Dr. Bowen had been kind enough to add, with just a touch of the patronizing, "I'm going to find you a real church, Dick. Brooklyn's supposed to be slow, but it's strong on churches, and this work with Rimborne will keep me in touch with the very best people."

"I—I wish you could," the Rev. Halli-

day had murmured, and then, being in a particularly gloomy and reckless mood at Dr. Jim Bowen's going, he had added again: "I *do* envy you!"

Well, did the Rev. Halliday but know it, he had no ground at all for envy, Dr. Bowen reflected bitterly as he came to what seemed to be the end of McDonough Street and stopped on the corner. Hallas might be little and remote, and poor and God-forsaken, but at least it fed and housed its minister; whereas its late doctor, having wished his practise on the suffering medical man over at Hallas Crossing, stood here with four dollars and ten cents in his clothes, and—Dr. Jim Bowen laughed savagely and thrust his hands in his light overcoat-pockets.

What had happened yesterday up at Hallas was of small account now. The thing that really mattered was, what was going to happen to him now and tomorrow and all through the future?

What on earth was he to do? Not return to Hallas, certainly. He had not even the railroad fare; but supposing himself to be in Hallas at that minute he would be hardly better off in the way of habitation or living.

Part of the poor furnishings he had contrived for the forlorn little house had gone to settling the last two years of unpaid rent; the other part had gone to the Widow Mackay, his housekeeper, who was marrying again and charitably willing to accept the nucleus of a new home in lieu of unpaid wages.

As for making a living at Hallas, he had been trying that for twelve years, and the four dollars was the net result—and since he seemed to have drifted back to Hallas again, Dr. Jim Bowen once more jerked himself back to Brooklyn and the really awful query: what *was* he to do now?

Obviously, he could not stand forever on the corner. A professional man and a total abstainer, he could hardly seek the seclusion of the saloon back room as a place to think out his problem; and, having dined well on the train, he was not ready for even the bargain-priced dinner that loomed ahead.

Across the way a trolley-car stopped, deposited a passenger, and rumbled on its way again. Dr. James Bowen gazed at it with an acid smile.

That conventional, rattling vehicle, with its "Brooklyn Rapid Transit" along the top and its "B. R. T." in a circle on the side, somehow typified the drop he had taken. Half an hour back, he had been silly enough to picture himself driving the Rimborne car around town and gazing contentedly at the unlucky element which walked; at present, he might thank his lucky stars if he owned car-fare a week hence.

Although, come to think of it, he need waste no time despising trolley-cars just now. For a mere nickel one of them would furnish him with a seat wherein to think, and that was what he needed most until the first dreadful shock was past.

Dr. Jim Bowen, observing another car bowling toward him in the distance, halted the letter-carrier who had just left the flat-house at his side and asked:

"Excuse me, but where does that car go?"

"Ocean Avenue? Sheepshead Bay."

"Is it a long ride?" Dr. Bowen asked drearily.

"All the way down to the bay," the carrier grinned. "Biggest nickel's worth the B. R. T.'s giving, I guess."

He flitted on, blowing his whistle as he vanished in the next house. Dr. Bowen, with a sigh, crossed the street and waited for the car; and presently he was hunched down in a corner, staring at the busy street into which they had turned, trying to find the answer.

What had brought him to this direpass, anyway? He knew his business thoroughly; with the vast amount of reading he had been able to do these last years, he was almost ready to specialize the nose and throat.

He was tireless and faithful to a fault; taken by and large, his proportion of com-

plete successful recoveries had been really amazing. He was in short a first-class physician, of the stuff which, given opportunity, makes great surgeons as well.

But he had been too darned full of scruples and ethics and diffidence and charity! Howville, of Richburg, for whom Hallas folks were wont to send in serious cases, was a country doctor, too, but prosperous to a degree! Why? Because, ever and always, he lunged into a case, did his duty, and collected every penny the traffic would bear and some it was forced to bear!

Howville never hesitated about anything, never permitted his heart to bleed at any one's hard-luck story; whereas, about all Dr. Jim Bowen could remember of Hallas people was the story of how the meager crops had failed; how Bill had lost his job with the lumber company; how the inspector had condemned all three income-bearing milch cows!

Dr. Jim Bowen, in short, had lacked push—and now, sitting up and glaring around, he snarled to himself and vowed that if ever in this world he got on his feet he would show the world a variety of punch that would attract attention.

The car had turned three or four times. Where under the sun were they now? Dr. Jim, noting a college to the left of him, and a baseball park in the right distances, concluded that there was still much riding to be done, and settled back to his meditation.

He had neither the price to live in New York or Brooklyn, nor the price to leave them and go elsewhere, had there been anywhere else to go. He would have to stay here and makeshift—somehow.

How? One does not start an office and wait for patients on a capital of four dollars and five cents. Board of Health medical jobs, city posts, and that sort of thing probably had fifty applicants waiting for each vacancy. The drug-houses, some of the medicinal factories, use doctors—and that, Dr. Jim Bowen concluded after another long period of thought, was the answer!

Personal and professional pride must go into the discard together. He would have to find some kind of furnished room for a dollar or two, and his trunks would have to remain unclaimed for the present; and if, until he could find a job, Dr. Jim Bowen was able to sustain life without selling his precious, long-cherished instruments, he would give up thanks from the bottom of his bitter heart!

His trolley chariot was motionless. Come to think of it, the car had been standing still for some time.

The man next to Dr. Jim Bowen gave a last irritating rustle to his paper, threw it to the floor, and rose, tramping out with the acrid remark that this was B. R. T. service, and every time a wagon broke down on the tracks the cars stopped. The unfortunate from Hallas, observing two or three cars ahead of them, followed slowly to the platform and the calm conductor.

"What part of the world is this?" he asked. "I'm a stranger."

"Flatbush—this is Farragut Road. Go sit down, mister; you can't walk to the bay from here. We ain't held up for more'n fifteen minutes till the wrecker gets here."

"This will do me as well as the bay," Dr. Bowen muttered, stepping off.

It was quiet out here, with a prosperous quiet conducive to thought. Lines of bare trees, endless bare shrubs, suggested that the region might be beautiful in summer. It was attractive enough now, for that matter.

Big, expensive, detached houses stretched far ahead as the unlucky one loitered up a cross-street — houses with children and garages and maids moving about—the sort of houses one would like to own and inhabit, with all they meant.

This huge stucco home just beside with the pretty woman in the window caused certain fierce stirrings in Dr. Jim Bowen and brought back Howville's frequent assertion that every doctor needed a pretty, practical wife if he was to get along. And that impressive, Englishy affair of dusky

red brick ahead was enough to rouse the outcast's envy, too.

Dr. Jim Bowen, gazing at it, grunted suddenly, and, for the second time that afternoon, stopped short before a doctor's shingle. But where the first had borne the name of a dead man, these chaste brass letters displayed the name of one who seemed to be alive and whose title was ornamental: "Dr. Poldhane Whinnys."

"Well, *what*," Dr. Jim Bowen muttered vulgarly, "do you know about that?"

CHAPTER III.

THE ABSENT PHYSICIAN.

IN all the world there might conceivably be several people named Poldhane Whinnys; certainly, however, no two of them had ever studied medicine and settled in or near New York.

This, beyond any question, was the home of Polly Whinnys, the class joke in medical school—Polly, more familiarly known as "Fathead," who had regarded all medicine as a vague puzzle into which he had been thrust by a misguided family—Polly, who had owned more real luck and less real sense than any other living human!

With a rush the details of a forgotten personality came back to Dr. Jim Bowen. He saw the round red cheeks and the childlike blue eyes, which gazed with much wonder and little understanding into each new anatomical mystery; he heard the loud, cheery, irresponsible voice and sensed the care-free, happy assurance that always seemed to travel with Polly.

Why, it had been his habit to write hair-raising adventure and throbbing romance, just for the fun of the thing, while Jim Bowen labored over theses! It had been Polly's wont to rave about the waitress's blond hair or the unfathomable black eyes of the dean's daughter, while Jim Bowen packed his mind with details of the minor nerves and tricky diagnostic distinctions.

And now Polly was ministering to the ailing from a forty-thousand-dollar house, while Jim Bowen stood outside with four dollars in his pocket!

Well, luck had always been with Polly. When it had come to the last finals, he had sailed through with all flags flying, a beautiful mystery to himself, his friends, and his instructors.

In their brief intern days together, too, there had been the night when the hideous accident case came in and the house-surgeon pronounced the man quite dead—whereupon Polly, after scratching his head thoughtfully over the remains for a while, had gone to work in his cheery, experimental way, and some five weeks later had discharged the victim, alive, well, and in one piece.

And there had been other manifestations of the luck that knows no breaking; but Dr. Jim Bowen, sour to the core for the moment, declined to think of them. The house spoke for itself, and he moved on—and stopped.

It was a distinctly small thought for a man naturally rather big; but if he happened in on Polly now it was dollars to doughnuts that Dr. Poldhane Whinnys would ask him to stop for dinner; and while he might enjoy the talk and meeting Polly's family, and reviving old memories, and all that sort of thing, Dr. Jim Bowen knew in his innermost heart that if he rang that bell it would be mainly for the chance of saving fifty cents!

Brick red came to his cheek, for self-deception was his weakest point.

He tried to turn away and failed. He groaned, in spirit and aloud, and stepped up the white sandstone flight to Dr. Whinny's red-tiled veranda.

After all, it was rather good to feel that he had one acquaintance on earth—a friend, for that matter, because Polly was really that. He would have to be frank and tell his troubles; not burst into them, of course, but lead up to them gently and keep his dire poverty a secret.

And undoubtedly Polly would know chemical firms hereabout and give him a letter to some people in authority. All in all, Dr. Jim Bowen's smile was mainly relief as he asked the maid:

"Is Dr. Whinnys at home?"

"The doctor has no afternoon office-hours, sir."

"I'm not a patient, you know—I'm a friend of his, Dr. Bowen," said the visitor.

The maid stepped back and smiled.

"Won't you come in, doctor?" she asked him. "Are you one of the gentlemen he was expecting might call?"

"I'm afraid not, I haven't seen him for years."

The door closed behind him. Over this way was a reception-room such as he had dreamed about owning himself—some day when a billionaire was taken suddenly ill at Hallas and later expressed his gratitude to the local doctor.

At the other side of the big hallway, as the maid drew back a curtain, was one of the coziest and most expensive little drawing-rooms Dr. Jim Bowen remembered seeing; and the maid, his hat and coat in hand, was hesitating doubtfully.

"Mrs. Whinnys is out, too, doctor," she explained, "so I can't tell you just when the doctor will be back. I'm not sure, but I think he left word that if he hadn't returned by five he wouldn't be back for dinner. Will you wait?"

"Until five, anyway."

It was a hospitable household, evidently, with a well-trained maid.

"Then you'll find magazines in here, sir," she said, "and if you wish to smoke and look over the medical journals, the doctor's office is just at the end of the hall."

After that Dr. Jim Bowen was left alone with his thoughts.

They did not fill him with overwhelming cheer. It was not that he actually envied Polly, but he was human enough to admit frankly that all the luxury did hold a certain sting. He was thoroughly glad to find Polly Whinnys—or any other reasonably deserving soul—so prosperously fixed; but Dr. Jim Bowen would have liked some of it for his own!

Children were romping on the veranda now. He stood unsmilingly behind the curtains and watched them. Three there were, two boys and a baby girl, and they were Polly's kids, fast enough, blue eyes, red cheeks, voices and all.

Five minutes and Dr. Jim, for no obvious reason, found that he could watch them no longer without continuing the absurd series of long sighs. He loitered from the drawing-room and through the corridor to the closed door at the end; he passed through it and strolled into Polly Whinny's consulting-room.

In here the furniture was all Circassian and pale tan leather, perfect, high-priced. Case after case held a library that might have roused the envy of a medical college. The nearer door to the right revealed a little snow-white surgery; the farther one, as Dr. Jim Bowen stepped in and looked about, gave into as trim a laboratory as the heart could have wished, all shining glass and copper and white tile, with tools of bacteriology and physiological chemistry so many and bewildering that there were some he could not even name.

At another time Dr. Jim would have purred and grinned and prodded all about, reveling in the perfection of the place; just now he found that he could not examine things calmly. He walked back to the office and its window.

Behind the house, at the end of the long yard, a garage stood, door open. And here were six thousand dollars' worth of touring-car and a highly professional-looking little electric and a vacant space; while in the shadows he noted a battery-charging plant and—again Dr. Jim Bowen turned away!

Polly Whinnys had everything on earth; he himself had four dollars and five cents!

With a last heavy sigh, therefore, Dr. Jim seated himself at the desk of his old friend and took to reading.

Several of the magazines he had been unable to afford this last year; here was

one with an account of an operation which fairly thrilled him. He himself had been contemplating just that sort of possibility in such a case; he flattened the magazine and read and read—and the clock, ticking off minute after minute, crept to the hour of five, struck unheeded, and crept on again.

At Dr. Bowen's elbow, the telephone rang sharply.

There would be another phone in the house, of course, and the maid would answer the call—although apparently there was not, for the bell jingled again. Dr. Bowen picked up the instrument, tilted back, and called:

"Hello!"

"Doctor!" a man's agitated voice said swiftly. "I'm speaking to the doctor himself?"

"You're speaking to Dr.—"

"All right—all right!" the voice cut in impatiently. "Doctor, are you at liberty just now?"

"Very much so," Dr. Bowen muttered grimly.

"Have you your pencil handy?" the excited tone rushed on. "Ready? The name is Catterson—Charles Catterson. You know the home, perhaps?"

"No," said Dr. Bowen, jotting down the name for Polly's future attention.

The voice gave a number on Clinton Avenue. "Come quick, doctor!" it added.

"But—"

"Please put this call before anything and everything else and come at once, doctor!" said the unknown. "Don't ask particulars now, please, because the case is too urgent and the minutes are too precious. One of your patients—no, doctor, I don't know which one—commended you to Mr. Catterson as the one doctor in Brooklyn who was absolutely sure to answer instantly and certain to handle matters, should the thing become acute. You can start at once? Say that you'll start at once, doctor!"

Dr. Bowen smiled grimly. It was the old, old story, known to every medical man the world over.

Somebody had swallowed a button, somebody had contrived a half-inch cut on the end of a finger—and the whole household fancied that death, in eight or ten assorted forms, was trying to force an entrance!

"Well, just a moment," he began quietly. "You see—"

"Not a second, sir!" the voice panted. "You *must* come! Do you hear, doctor? You *must!* And one thing more, doctor!"

"Eh?"

"Don't come in your car, doctor! *Don't!* I can't explain now, but there is a good reason for that and—hurry! Hurry!" the voice concluded.

And a click indicated that, its owner having said his say and taken the rest for granted, he had rushed from the telephone.

CHAPTER IV.

THE QUEER CASE.

WHAT did it mean, anyway?

Dr. Jim Bowen smiled whimsically and failed to grow excited. The odds, he fancied, were about fifty to one that nothing was seriously wrong in the Catterson home, and yet the person at the other end of the wire had certainly felt the need of a doctor, if one judged by the odd, breathless crack in his voice. More than that, he wished Dr. Poldhane Whinnys and in a hurry!

Still, cautioning a man to make haste by leaving his car behind was rather an odd idea, was it not? The practitioner from Hallas stared at the telephone and pondered.

Evidently it was an eccentric person who wished Polly, the only man in Brooklyn absolutely certain to handle matters. That being so, the chances were that he was wealthy because a poor citizen would hardly be ordering around one of Polly's evident opulence. And that, in turn, being so, Polly doubtless would wish him for a patient—would want to get him now and keep him.

Dr. Bowen gazed at Polly's expensive office clock. It was quarter past five, and growing dark. Polly, apparently, was not coming home for dinner, and the hasty one was doomed to disappointment unless—

Dr. Bowen started slightly at the entrance of the trim maid, who pressed the wall-push and lighted the office.

"No word of the doctor?" he queried.

"No, doctor. He'll hardly be home now, I think. That's what I came to tell you, sir. Mrs. Whinnys, though, will be back for dinner."

"Do you happen to know who takes Dr. Whinnys's cases when he isn't about?"

"Dr. Pelling, around the corner, sir, but he went to the hospital himself yesterday."

James Bowen, M.D., hesitated a final instant and then rose.

"A call has just come from a family named Catterson," said he. "It seems to be urgent, so perhaps I'd better take it myself, and very likely I'll come back here afterward to report to Dr. Whinnys. Tell him that, please."

"Very well, doctor."

"And which way do I walk for Clinton Avenue, by the way?"

"You'll hardly want to walk, sir," the maid smiled. "I think you'd better go over that way and take the Flatbush Avenue car and get a transfer to Vanderbilt Avenue. Or you might go in the other direction and take the Brighton Elevated at Newkirk Avenue and get off at Vanderbilt."

Dr. Jim Bowen tried to commit it to memory.

"I'll stick to Flatbush Avenue, I guess," he muttered vaguely. "It seems more familiar. I saw that name coming down here."

In the woods he was noted for his sense of location—which was well, for it enabled him to follow the direction of the maid's pointing finger after he had left the home of Polly Whinnys.

Blocks of detached houses his long legs put behind and further blocks; he was just beginning to doubt his own accuracy when the familiar "B. R. T." clanged by at the far end of the square, on a long, low rakish car of solid steel with "Flatbush Avenue" over its middle door.

Well, the traction corporation had collected another nickel from him, which reduced his capital to the four one-dollar bills in his beautiful wallet. Dr. Jim read through his elaborate transfer and settled down to watch Brooklyn as revealed by twilight along Flatbush Avenue.

It seemed to be a big town; he wondered just why, in all his days, he had never made more than four or five trips to Brooklyn, but he did not wonder for long. His heavy thoughts dragged back to his own plight and the call just ahead of him.

Custom and friendship combined would deprive him even of the fee he was about to earn! Not so much as the wretched car-fare he was spending would be his reward for attending the suffering member of the Catterson family. In the matter of plain money profit, Brooklyn so far measured up to the Hallas standard in every respect.

Yet in all probability he would lose nothing; the little professional courtesy would put Polly Whinnys under some small obligation; and there might be need for that, Dr. Bowen reflected bitterly. People change oddly with the passing years.

It was more than possible that the wild, good-natured Polly Whinnys of twenty-three had turned into the pompous Dr. Whinnys of thirty-five or thirty-six. Perhaps it was as well that Catterson had called—and the conductor was doing some calling, too, by the way, and mentioning Vanderbilt Avenue.

Dr. Bowen hurried to the door and waited on the little island of concrete pavement for the coming of his next vehicle.

It arrived in time, bringing with it an obliging and loquacious conductor, who studied over the address Dr. Bowen mentioned as one studies a tremendous problem, talked it over with himself, and

eventually concluded that Gates Avenue was the proper point to leave his car. Some ten minutes more and Dr. Jim hurried through the young evening, to stand before the Catterson home.

If externals counted, the unknown was a patient worth having! This big place was almost in the mansion class, with more of its kind on either side. There should be a butler to answer his ring; there was, however, only a maid and an elderly, slovenly one at that.

She seemed to expect his coming, though.. She mumbled something about " doctor " and " just a minute " and left Dr. Jim in a dusky drawing-room, with two small lights burning beside the covered piano at the far end. He heard her steps scuff to the back of the house and then down-stairs—and that, in the matter of sound, was really all!

As a greeting for a doctor who had hurried to answer an emergency call, it was queer enough. Dr. Bowen, as a matter of course, had expected a frantic relative or two to rush down upon him, gasp out incoherent details, and then lead him swiftly to the case; he had even planned to do whatever might be necessary, and do it well, and then, when the excitement had died down, to reveal the awful fact that he was not Poldhane Whinnys after all, and that Dr. Whinnys would be along later if they wished him.

Instead, he was sitting all alone in a distinctly musty room of vast proportions, and the minutes were passing and still passing.

Somewhere above him, a low moan issued, floating through the heavy stillness in a fashion calculated to freeze the blood of a sensitive soul. Dr. Bowen, frowning, rose and stepped to the door, where he all but collided with the tall, lean man of forty, dressed in evening clothes and obviously calm, who was entering.

He stopped and squinted at Dr. Bowen, looking him over with a care that was at least puzzling. Then he said quickly:

" Mr. Catterson asks me to apologize for keeping you waiting, doctor. I think it will be quite all right for you to go up now."

" Well, if there is illness such as the call and that groan seem to indicate—" Dr. Bowen began sharply.

" Catterson was anxious to have you here as soon as possible, and that groan doesn't necessarily mean much, because we're rather used to them around here, doctor," the stranger said quietly. " Will you go up now, please? The big front room on the floor above—you'll find the door open."

He sighed and slipped into an overcoat that had been on the hall-rack. Plainly he at least did not know Polly Whinnys from Adam, or he would have made comment of some sort; and now he laid a hand on Dr. Jim's arm and said very softly:

" Doctor, you will remember one thing, will you not?"

" Eh?"

" Move and speak just as lightly as may be humanly possible—*up there,*" the enigma whispered significantly. " You'll understand what I mean, very shortly. You didn't come in your car?" he added, as he opened the door and glanced at the curb.

" No, I didn't," Dr. Bowen began curiously, " and may I ask—"

" Catterson will explain that, too," the stranger said impatiently, as he stepped out. " Good night, doctor, and good luck to you."

The latch clicked. Dr. Bowen was alone in the dusky corridor, with the stairs ahead, a faint light shining above and a sense of mystery that was more irritating than anything else.

A slow smile came to his lips. Unless Polly had changed a good deal, at about this point Dr. Whinnys's blue eye would have begun to glitter with eagerness; he would have stolen for the stairway with catlike tread and looked back at every step for possible armed pursuers such as never existed outside the covers of a dime novel.

Dr. Bowen, being of other material,

merely permitted his smile to die, shrugged his shoulders, and with no undue disturbance moved upward.

They were sparing of their light in this household. That soft glow from the front room was the only illumination in the upper hallway. Dr. Bowen considered it for a moment as he paused to listen, because it had seemed to him that ever so faintly another low moan had issued from somewhere on the floor. It was not repeated.

A perplexed grunt escaped him, and he walked into the lighted apartment—and the elderly man in dressing-gown and slippers rose hurriedly from his armchair, laid a finger on his lips for a moment as he rested heavily on his cane, and breathed:

"Sssh!"

There was something indefinably queer about him. Dr. Bowen could not put it into words, but it was there. Mystery seemed to enshroud the gentleman—or was it merely anxiety?—or was Dr. Jim growing imaginative under the stress of his own troubles?

Without comment he watched the evident Mr. Catterson hobble to a passageway and close the door softly, watched him shut the hall door as well, and then heard:

"My dear doctor, your coming is a tremendous relief!"

"I'm glad of that, sir," said the man from Hallas. "The patient—"

"In the sense that you expect, Dr. Whinnys, there is no patient," Catterson informed him, with a small, strained smile. "Will you permit me to do all the talking, sir, for a little? There may not be even a single minute to waste at just this stage."

"With pleasure," said Dr. Bowen, "but—"

"We'll sit over here, Dr. Whinnys, on this couch in the alcove, where our voices will be less likely to travel," the elder man went on with growing agitation. "Thank you. I am Mr. Catterson, of course, who sent for you. Doctor, you can spare me an hour or two?"

"Of course."

Mr. Catterson laid an uncertain hand on Dr. Bowen's knee.

"Doctor," his hoarse undertone pursued swiftly, "you have been most earnestly commended to me for the purpose which prompted my calling you. I am going to beg you, Dr. Whinnys, to combine medicine with—ah—something else for a little. I am going to ask that you use to its fullest extent the gift of—ah—acute and constructive observation, if I may so term it, for which you are noted. In short, I am asking that you abandon medicine, except as emergency may arise, and turn detective for one evening!"

He paused, as if to consider his next words.

Dr. Bowen sighed. Only one thing was plain: neither Polly nor Polly's reputation had altered in twelve years. Perhaps he had evolved into a scientific detective, such as one finds in fiction occasionally; perhaps he had undertaken some other bizarre line which fitted him for Catterson's matter, whatever that might be.

The sad certainty was that Dr. Jim Bowen would be wasting his own time and Mr. Catterson's by listening further and permitting the latter gentleman to think him Polly Whinnys. He opened his lips to undeceive Mr. Catterson—but the gentleman was speaking again:

"As to compensation, Dr. Whinnys, if you succeed you may ask almost any fee within reason. Whether you succeed or not, I shall gladly pay you five hundred dollars for your time."

Dr. Jim Bowen's mouth closed so suddenly that the teeth clicked!

CHAPTER V.

THE BOX THAT VANISHED.

THE chief disadvantage of being human is that temptation dances ever just ahead, in one form or another, from the cradle to the grave—an uncomfortable condition if one chances to own a conscience. Dr. Jim Bowen possessed one

of the ablest and most sensitive consciences in the world; yet it was not sufficiently strong just now to part his lips again and release his true identity.

Five hundred dollars! Why, for five hundred dollars, in his mental state this evening, he would undertake anything short of murder! With five hundred real dollars in his pocket he could settle down comfortably in a first-class boarding-house, draw his breath, recover from the shock of Dr. Rimborne's passing, and look about for work that fitted his undoubted capabilities.

To-night five hundred dollars meant the difference between utter ruin and humiliation, and an assured five months of comfortable existence, with all that that entailed.

Nor was it as if Polly Whinnys needed five hundred dollars. That favored soul had spent more than that sum for his office Oriental carpet alone. And other little arguments raced along, prodding Dr. Jim like so many imps.

What Polly could do, he could do—of that he felt certain. And if Polly had been on hand, he would have taken the job, whatever it was—and he hadn't been on hand.

And still more, if that suggestion of "almost any fee" were realized, he could split with Polly; or if Polly felt injured, he could, and of course would, hand over the entire sum. And also—

Dr. Jim Bowen sat back suddenly. Right or wrong, his mind was made up!

"Go on, Mr. Catterson," he said quietly.

"You find the terms satisfactory, doctor? I am very glad of that," Catterson's whisper continued. "I'll try to tell you about the thing as briefly as possible, and please determine as I talk what questions you wish to ask. Dr. Whinnys, I have a daughter."

Dr. Jim bowed.

"She is twenty-two now, and for nearly a year she has been afflicted with a most peculiar nervous disease."

"Of what sort?"

"Your profession, sir," Catterson sighed heavily, "has failed to give it any definite name and—what is more deplorable—has failed to find any remedial measures which were of the least avail. Later, if you feel warranted in so doing, I may ask you to undertake the case itself; for the present I can tell you only that three of our greatest specialists have tried to treat Helen, without success."

"I see."

"Frequently, for a week at a time, she is perfectly rational and normal in every way. Again, doctor, she will become subject to the most distressing attacks of fainting—you have a better name for it, I believe—which sometimes lapse into actual coma, a state which persists sometimes for five minutes and sometimes for two or three days. Frequently the child becomes sullen and silent, although by nature she has the sweetest disposition I have ever known. When this state possesses her, Dr. Whinnys, it is positively dangerous to question even her slightest whim. She will fly into a passion of the most distressing kind and—ah, dear me!"

"I understand," Dr. Jim said gently.

"Dr. Kaswel, the neurologist, assured us that should we fail to humor her at such times, her reason might be permanently impaired," Catterson went on, with a wretched little smile. "If she wishes to talk, we must talk with her—and it is by no means unusual to find her conversing quite rationally in the very middle of an attack! On the other hand, if she wishes to maintain silence we must fall in with the mood or risk consequences beyond prediction.

"If she wishes to sit alone, we must permit her to do so; and as has happened recently, she will remain almost motionless in a chair for seven or eight hours at a time. Again, she will be taken with a desire to wander alone in the streets, and on these occasions her cunning is the cunning of the insane. Twice, when I have had Helen followed by members of the household to insure her safety, she has discovered what was afoot and passed into

the hysterical fury. Do you think that you grasp the general condition, doctor?"

"So far as such a thing can be grasped without long and careful study of the case, yes."

"Very well, then I can pass to the phase which immediately concerns us, sir," sighed Mr. Catterson. "Some two weeks ago, Dr. Whinnys, my daughter—in some manner that may never be explained—found a certain steel cash-box of mine and carried it out of the house on one of her trips. It is merely an ordinary steel box with a combination lock, worth perhaps three or four dollars; but it contained documents of such a nature that—no, I can't even hint at their nature, Dr. Whinnys. In themselves they are worth many thousands of dollars to any one sufficiently intelligent to use them; to me, sir, they are all but priceless!"

"She did not bring back the box?" asked Dr. Jim, who was growing interested.

"She returned without it, sir, and the most careful and cautious questioning has failed to draw from the girl one single hint as to what disposition she made of the thing! At the same time, we know that she has made at least one trip back to its hiding-place, and that in some manner she, or some interested person, has learned the combination."

"How do you know that?"

"Because I have learned that at least one of the papers is out of the box," shuddered Catterson. "What may happen to the rest, what may have happened already, I dare not think. Do you see where all this is leading?"

"Not entirely."

"It is between six and seven in the evening, and lately almost every evening, that Helen leaves the house," continued Helen's father. "She is absent, sometimes for an hour, sometimes for several hours. To-night, I have no doubt whatever, she will leave as usual; and to-night you, sir, a perfect stranger to the child, will follow her. You will keep as close as possible to her, avoiding attracting attention, of course; you will watch as carefully as may be for my cash-box.

"If she enters a building of any kind, you will follow her, on whatever pretext, Dr. Whinnys. But above all, should she fall in a faint or enter one of her really violent conditions, you will be on hand to render expert medical aid—and after all, I think that that, perhaps, is why I am so anxious to have you near her, doctor!"

Catterson sighed.

Dr. Jim Bowen gazed over his head and pondered. It was like to be an easy way of earning five hundred dollars and an interesting one as well, for nervous diseases had always held a certain fascination for him and—Catterson's shaky hand was on his knee again.

"You will undertake it, Dr. Whinnys?" he asked.

"Yes, at your figure," smiled Dr. Jim.

"And you will promise me to use the very utmost caution, sir—the most extreme caution, doctor!—to avoid exciting the child?" Catterson whispered, tightening his grip on the knee. "Yes, yes, I know that it sounds absurd to you, Dr. Whinnys, but the poor little girl is my only daughter, and anxiety over her these last years has well-nigh driven me insane myself. I—hark!"

There was nothing uncertain this time about the moan which vibrated on the heavy air of the house. Long-drawn and low, with a wild note that was almost animal, it came penetratingly from regions at the rear. Catterson, listening with drawn face, rose to his feet.

"She is moving about, I think," he said agitatedly. "Come, doctor! I wish you to see her without letting her see you. Be very careful in walking, please."

Shuffling noiselessly in his slippers, he led the way to the closed door of the passage at the side, opened it and listened, and then with trembling fingers beckoned Dr. Jim to follow down the dark, narrow little corridor. Somewhat thrilled, the practitioner from Hallas tiptoed after; and, having passed a pair of marble

basins, they were close to a thick velvet curtain and Catterson was breathing into his ear:

"Stand here, Dr. Whinnys! Right here and look through the little space between the curtains. There, sir! Can you see her?"

Dr. Bowen, lips parted in astonishment, nodded. He did indeed see her! He saw, not the haggard, twitching wreck of a young woman that might have been expected, but a girl of such startling beauty that his pulses quickened.

The profile, which he could just glimpse as she stood by the window looking out into the night, was perfect in every line and curve; whatever her mental state, even the thick, dark hair breathed physical health.

Not that such a condition was impossible, of course; the most powerful man Dr. Jim had ever seen had been in a padded cell and that permanently; but this girl—ah, she was turning now! The doctor from Hallas looked more intently, and felt rather convinced that Catterson had not exaggerated matters; for the expression of the lovely eyes was sad and vacant, and the manner in which she shook her head slowly and stroked her cheek as she sighed was far from normal.

Catterson pressed nearer to him as she moved slowly across the room, and he felt Catterson's trembling fingers on him again and heard:

"Is she going to that closet?"

"Apparently," Dr. Jim whispered.

"Then be ready to leave, sir," the elder man whispered, trembling the harder. "She has gone for her hat."

"She's putting it on now," breathed Dr. Bowen.

CHAPTER VI.

AROUND THE TOWN.

DR. JIM turned and tiptoed back quickly to the room they had left, and perhaps even the perturbed Catterson noted the change in him. Up to the very moment of seeing the girl he had been puzzled and startled and not at all sure that, in spite of everything, he would not decline the task that had been planned for Polly. But it was otherwise now!

That, under any circumstances, they should have been stupid enough to permit a young and lovely girl like that to wander abroad while mentally subnormal was downright incredible. A thousand things might have happened to her; none of them, he felt certain would happen to her to-night; and when she was once more safely within the house—with whatever result as concerned the wretched cash-box that so concerned her father—Dr. Jim would give elderly Mr. Catterson a "talking to" about the case.

"We'll leave this door ajar, sir!" Catterson doddered on. "She leaves the house without a word, but we'll be able to hear her go down-stairs. You have your hat and overcoat, eh? That's good! There'll be nothing to rouse her suspicion as she passes out. Doctor, will you promise—"

"I'll promise that nothing will happen to her which I can prevent, and I can prevent most things that are likely to happen to her!" Dr. Jim said briefly, buttoning the coat over his broad chest.

"And now as to the box, sir."

"What?" snapped the doctor.

"It's a small affair, sir, about so big and so deep, and it's pretty well worn as to paint. There are no marks of identification on the outside, but my initials are painted in gold on the inside of the lid, doctor—'C. B. C.' I mention this, sir, because if you locate the box it is more than likely to be open, I fear, and—"

"If I can find your box, I'll get it back to you," Dr. Bowen said briefly. "Listen! Is that the door down-stairs?"

"That—that is Helen, just pushing back the latch," Catterson quavered. "And now, Dr. Whinnys, I can depend on you to stick until—"

"I'll stick until the girl is safe in the house again," the physician said briefly

as he stepped into the dark hallway and to the head of the stairs.

His ears had not deceived him. Even then Catterson's daughter was passing out into the night.

Dr. Bowen, as the front door closed softly, raced down-stairs and opened it again; she was no more than on the street now, and he waited through ten seconds or so and glanced out again. This time she was several houses down the block, and Dr. Bowen, with a last mutter of astonishment at the sort of father who had been permitting this kind of thing to go without precautions, stepped into the open air and followed the girl down the street.

She was certainly not loitering. At a brisk, erect walk she was moving toward the far corner now. She reached it and stopped, looking down the intersecting street, and Dr. Bowen, quietly as might be, drew close to her and waited for the next move and—oh, she was waiting for a car, eh?

This was another stranger of the B. R. T. flock, labeled "Greene and Gates Avenues," and Miss Catterson boarded it with firm step, unaware that Dr. Jim Bowen had swung to the back platform and was standing there with his eyes on her back as she sat in the middle of the car.

The second of his nickels had taken him to Catterson's; he would have to change one of his precious dollars. It struck Dr. Bowen as a curious commentary on the suddenness with which things can happen, that he could smile as he extracted one of the four notes from his morocco wallet and passed it to the conductor.

Nor did the smile vanish as he slid the change into his trouser-pocket; rather it turned on the conductor himself, as the agent of the traction corporation that had taken him to Polly Whinny's home. But for the unconscious kindness of that Ocean Avenue car in stopping where it did, he would never have known that Polly Whinnys was alive, he would never have been standing here and watching the prettiest girl he had ever seen.

And whither was she leading him, by the way? Dr. Bowen, looking about, felt the bewilderment stealing back on him; they were heading in a direction altogether new, but the supply of flats and homes, homes and flats, showed no signs of thinning out.

They had been turning corners, too, which seemed to be a trick of Brooklyn trolleys; they had crossed a well-lighted asphalt street, where many automobiles bowled up and down; they had rolled down a dark block and banged over crossing car-tracks—and now, at the end of another, they had banged over more tracks, and unless his eyes were playing tricks they were going to bang over further tracks at the end of this square, too.

And what was more to the point, among several passengers who had risen to leave the car was Miss Helen Catterson!

Dr. Jim Bowen, his face turned from the light, swung down to the step and dropped off before the car had stopped, turning in the direction from which they had come, as he made the sidewalk, and walking briskly for several yards until he dared pause and look back.

She had descended; she was standing there now and looking about, trying, as it seemed, to remember something. Then, quite unexpectedly, she quickened and crossed the street, paused for a moment, and gazed at the dingy window of what seemed to be a second-hand store of assorted articles, and entered.

Dr. Bowen's eyes were excellent, and it was pleasantly dark over here. He remained on his own curb and watched intently. She was in there now, and—yes, the man had taken something from the window and handed it to her.

She was examining it, too; and now, with that same vague shake of the head, she appeared to have handed it back and she was leaving the store and moving slowly toward the corner of the cross-street.

The medico-detective, with a stride of really astonishing length, crossed to the store and gazed in. And his eyes had been quite accurate! The article, still in the hands of the shirt-sleeved dealer, was a rather battered cash-box!

An instant the excellent doctor hesitated; Miss Catterson seemed to have no immediate intention of leaving her corner. Dr. Bowen, heart beating excitedly, stepped into the store—because there could not be a doubt in the world that she had led him straight to the box itself. Its size, its whole appearance, were such as Catterson had described.

Possibly, through some mental freak, she had carried it here and sold it, but how ever it had arrived mattered little enough now. Could he but gain possession of the thing, five hundred good dollars would land in Dr. Jim's pocket, and he dared not think how many more five hundreds might accompany them.

"That box!" he shot amazingly at the dealer. "How much?"

"Huh?" the startled man asked.

"This box!" said Dr. Bowen, and snatched it up. "What's it worth? I want to buy it!"

"Why, about two dollars, I guess, but—"

The morocco wallet whisked into sight and a veritable hymn of thanks arose from Dr. Bowen's soul. It was his, and still a dollar to spare in the wallet! With the box under his arm, he hurtled out of the store again, because the girl had by no means left his mind.

He clutched his treasure and looked about. There was another car at the corner now, and Miss Catterson was just stepping aboard and the man on the rear platform was pulling his bell-rope. The vehicle rattled across the Gates Avenue tracks before he quite comprehended that she was moving away from him.

Dr. Bowen raced after it, dodged a protesting innocent bystander who just contrived to jump out of his path, and tried a flying leap for the car. His free hand clutched an iron upright and clung fast. Other hands reached down and gripped his shoulders as he tottered on the edge of the step—and so he struggled aboard, and a rather harsh voice was asking:

"Say, if you wanter kill yourself, why don't you take poison? That's no way to get on a car."

Bowen merely smiled at the man as he regained breath.

"Er—where does this car go?" he asked somewhat insanely, by way of making conventional reply.

"Tompkins — Kingston — Malbone t' Prospect Park station," the conductor answered sourly. "Where d'ye want to go?"

Up at the forward end of the car Miss Catterson was in another of the cross-seats, looking moodily from the window, safe, and wholly unaware of his presence. Under his arm Catterson's beastly treasure was tucked securely.

"That's where I want to go," Dr. Bowen said cheerfully, surrendering another nickel.

CHAPTER VII.

JOLTS.

HE had won! Aided by the most absurd luck, Bowen had accomplished what Catterson seemed to consider the evening's main purpose in a matter of half an hour or less. The box was safe, and now, with all night ahead for thought, very likely he would contrive a way of getting the girl back to her home.

And after that? Well, it was curious, all things considered, that Dr. Bowen should dwell so earnestly on the future at just this time; but after he had squared accounts with Catterson they would be friends—of so much the elderly man's gratitude would assure him.

And once he was established in the person's good graces, it was Dr. Jim's full intention to take charge of his daughter's case—aye, even if he had to grab it by the most unethical methods in the world!

And when he had had opportunity to study the trouble at close range, there would be a cure, and a permanent one, specialists or no specialists. A newly developed sixth sense informed Dr. Jim that this was the solid fact, and after the cure had been effected—

This car was turning corners, too! It had switched into a street with many stores and an elevated railroad overhead, jogged along a bit, and abandoned the business thoroughfare for a darker stretch, where houses and flats loomed up again inevitably, and rattled on and on.

They came to a tiny park and passed it, and, reaching a new area of small business, thundered over other car-tracks and now the conductor was shouting:

"Eastern Parkway!"

Rather abruptly it dawned on Dr. Bowen that Miss Catterson had risen and, still staring straight ahead and all unseeing, was coming toward him. He snorted, causing the conductor to start violently, and stepped to the street; and since there was another of the apartments just ahead of him, he walked straight into the empty vestibule, stopped, waited, and glanced out cautiously.

The girl was just turning the corner.

It might be a parkway, Dr. Bowen reflected, as he followed at a distance; it bore more resemblance to a trench dug for giant warfare. But for the sidewalks, the entire street had been opened wide, and the misty memory of a feature article in a New York Sunday paper came to suggest that they were digging a subway here.

Only briefly, however, did his attention linger upon matters so remote. Miss Catterson was moving on steadily, a hundred feet ahead, pausing now and then as she gazed confusedly at the huge dirt-piles. It behooved him to keep one wary eye on her, of course, but for the life of him he could not resist a more careful examination of his cash-box.

This was the treasure! Even then the icy chill that was about to visit Dr. Bowen's very bones did not betray a sign of its nearness. He held up his box and studied it eagerly. There was the combination, fast enough! What if he were able to open it and see what mystic stuff so concerned Catterson?

Although, on the first calm thought he had expended on the matter, the box did seem rather light to hold much of importance. Dr. Bowen, frowning, shook it suddenly. Nothing, so far as he could judge, moved about within.

His frown turned to a scowl, and he shook the thing again—and if it were not absolutely empty its contents were so extremely soft and light that they could be no more than feathers.

The chill, then, crept slowly over Dr. Bowen. What if he had expended two of his three remaining dollar bills on the wrong box? He hadn't, of course, but—what if he had?

Catterson might conceivably change his mind about that five hundred dollars, might drop dead before he could pay it, might do a dozen other unpleasant things that would leave Dr. Jim with just one dollar and some odd change in the whole world!

Despite the night breeze, little drops of perspiration shone on Dr. Bowen's forehead. A scared glance revealed Miss Catterson moving along as before and within easy sight; he paused under a street-lamp and twirled the dial of the combination lock—and, little as he knew about combination locks, there was something in the loose readiness of this one to spin that was far from reassuring.

Why, the little circle fairly rattled as it came to rest again! And here Dr. Bowen, failing to breathe, made the fatal, what should have been the most obvious, experiment.

One cold hand tugged at the cover. There was a rusty scratch, and the box opened with the utmost ease. Before him, facing an interior as empty as the day the thing had left the factory, the cover stood erect.

Nor was it without a legend, although the words scratched into the paint with

a pin at some remote date bore no resemblance to " C. B. C." " Stolen from John Henderson, Canarsie," proclaimed the scraggly letters—and that was really all!

Second after second the doctor from Hallas stood quite petrified. His two dollars were gone, sacrificed to an excited impulse that had been so full of conviction as never to carry a suggestion of doubt until this last awful minute. He had purchased the wreck of a cash-box, worth perhaps ten cents as junk—and the answer was idiotically simple.

Miss Catterson's mind, of course, was running on cash-boxes. She had seen this one in the window, and entered, doubtless with the idea that it was the box she sought. And then, with more intelligence than the supposedly sane Dr. Jim, she had handed it back and—he was two dollars out!

The cold drop that trickled into his eye caused Dr. Bowen to start and, fortunately, to return to the matter of the girl herself. She was far ahead now and walking steadily. He discerned her and, with a gulp, set off in pursuit again. A final burning stare he turned upon his two dollars' worth before hurling it far into the subway ditch. Then, head down and hands in his overcoat pockets, he resumed the chase.

It seemed almost as if she were looking for something in the excavation itself! She gave no attention at all to the houses on her right, but several times she crossed the narrow side roadway, stared briefly into the dark depths of the big trench, and returned to the sidewalk, each time shaking her head as if disappointed.

Dr. Bowen, the most painful stage of his shock passing, found spirits and curiosity rising again. The slip had been ridiculous and distressing, but Catterson would pay up as agreed, and it was quite all right and—where in the name of common sense was the girl making for now?

New purpose was in her step, and the puzzled head was held higher, as if its owner had reached some definite decision. They had covered five long, dark blocks of Parkway now, and she was waiting on the curb for a chance to cross through the many automobiles.

This, the sign informed Dr. Bowen, was Bedford Avenue; and now that she had gained its farther side Miss Catterson was heading for the brilliant roadhouse, or whatever it might be, on the other corner. Or—no, she wasn't, either. She passed the place and kept on straight ahead, to the end of that block and across more tracks, up hill for another square, and then along a shorter one; and now she was crossing to the brightly illuminated, rather magnificent structure on the other side of the Parkway.

That, if size of building and stairway meant anything, must be Brooklyn's new Borough Hall, although Dr. Bowen could not recall having heard about it. He paused at the edge of the sloping lawn and watched Miss Catterson slowly mount the steps; he glanced at the near-by sign and gleaned that he stood before Brooklyn's Museum and that a special exhibit of some sort was there this week.

He stepped forward to take the long climb himself—but Miss Catterson, apparently, had found herself astray once more. She was standing far above, head bowed in thought; and suddenly, quickening again, she was descending and keeping on.

The way was darker and lonelier now, for there were no houses. Grassy terraces rose to mysterious heights behind the tall iron fence; and Dr. Bowen felt, increasing his own gait, that it was really no place at all for an extremely pretty girl to be wandering after dark and alone. Brooklyn, doubtless, was as safe as any other community of its size; dozens, hundreds of women, probably, walked along here every night in the year without a thought of being annoyed; but Helen Catterson was far too lovely to escape attention should the rowdy element—

"*Huh?*" said Dr. Bowen.

Abstract thought, evidently, had led him directly to concrete fact! Two hun-

dred feet ahead a pair of well-dressed, well-built young men had paused directly in Miss Catterson's path, had apparently spoken to her. And now, plainly frightened, she was shrinking toward the iron fence!

CHAPTER VIII.

FURTHER JOURNEYS.

DOUBTLESS the fury that leaped up in Dr. Jim's bosom speaks well for his professional enthusiasm and his utter fidelity to the Catterson interests. Doubtless, had Helen been plain and wholly unattractive, he would have flushed in just that sudden, savage way and snarled.

Certain it is that he stopped in his tracks for a second and doubled his fists; certain also it is that, as one of the young men laughed aloud—an unpleasant, significant laugh!—and spoke again to Miss Catterson, that Dr. Bowen fairly bounced from the pavement in his eagerness to join the little party.

Because the girl was badly scared, as he observed on his third bound! She was trying to pass them, now, and the larger of the men was stepping in front of her, while the more thickset one drew close to her side. And then, just as it seemed that the girl was about to cry for help, Dr. James Bowen arrived!

Automatically, his capable fingers closed on the neck of the shorter member and whirled him about, nor was the grip released as Dr. Bowen's left fist came up beneath his chin. A wild yelp split the Parkway stillness—and the yelper spun around suddenly and then, thither propelled by a powerful, nicely placed kick, sprawled flat upon the sidewalk some twenty feet away!

"That," said Dr. Bowen, "for yours!"

And in the tiny instant of turning to the larger youth who, squinting in an amazed and distinctly ugly fashion, was on the verge of a leap at Dr. Jim, the practitioner from Hallas caught the girl's eye.

Logically, it should have been dilated with overwhelming terror as she glared about in search of a chance to escape. It was not, nor did Miss Catterson seem to contemplate flight just then.

Rather, the eye glowed utter astonishment at Dr. Bowen, glinted with some of the light that shines in the eye of the Spanish beauty watching the bull-fight and—Dr. Jim saw no more just then, because a very vicious swing whistled past his nose and missed it by the smallest fraction of an inch!

He stepped back deftly and laughed, for no apparent reason. He stepped forward rather more deftly and two hard thuds sounded almost as one, and after that came a third as the misguided young man met the sidewalk on the very spot from which his friend was just crawling.

Dr. Bowen grinned at the girl.

"Cheap and spectacular, but it had to be done!" he said. "I think I knocked that last one out!"

"No, he—he's getting up, but he isn't coming back," the girl answered, breathlessly.

"Well, I'm right here if he does," said her shadow. "Don't be frightened."

"I'm not," Miss Catterson said. "And—"

The voice trailed off suddenly, as if the girl had lost track of her thoughts. Dr. Jim, smiling pleasantly after the pair who, cursing him in a judicious undertone, were moving away uncertainly, concluded that the small affair was over, and turned to look at Miss Catterson.

She was even more beautiful than he had fancied. Her color had risen visibly even in the light of the arc-lamps; never in his life had he seen such a perfect chin or such an exquisite little nose; but—her eyes were vague again now!

She stared at Dr. Bowen with the same puzzled, distressed expression; her hand wandered to her cheek and stroked it in the same confused way. She was no more fit to be out unaccompanied than a year-old babe would have been, and a new decision came abruptly to Dr. Jim.

"If you will permit me," he said gently, "I should be very glad to take you—wherever you're going."

Miss Catterson's head nodded a slow negative.

"No," she murmured.

"But after that little experience, wouldn't it be better?"

"No," the girl said again, and the confusion seemed to increase.

"If you'll just—" Dr. Bowen persisted.

This time it was plain that the unfortunate young woman was making a violent effort toward coherent thought. The fast-winking eyes remained upon him and then looked about uncomprehendingly, and the girl's smile was pitiful as she said at last:

"No—no. I want to be alone, please."

"Very well," said Dr. Bowen.

"I'm—looking for something," Miss Catterson went on vaguely.

"Can't I be of some assistance in finding it?"

The stricken young woman hesitated and shook her head again.

"No, I—want to find it all alone, please," she replied softly.

Dr. Bowen drew a deep breath.

There was something about this girl that cut him to the quick! She was willing, temporarily, to talk, too; perhaps, with a little careful assistance, she could be led into connected thought.

"Do you mind telling me just what you are looking for?" he asked, ever so gently.

"Why—I don't know," the girl laughed helplessly, and ceased laughing on the instant! "That is what troubles—troubles me so. I want to find it, and still, when I look, I can't remember—I can't remember—"

"Was it a box, by any chance?" Dr. Jim asked suddenly.

An astonishing flash of intelligence came to the girl's eyes.

"Yes, that was it—that was it! A box!" she said eagerly.

"A metal box?" Dr. Bowen suggested.

"Yes, yes! A metal box!" the girl cried. "You know where it is, don't you? You'll tell me where it is? Where is the box, please?"

"I can't tell you just where it is at this minute, but if you'll try to think where you put it, perhaps we can find it together," said Dr. Jim. "Now, you took it from home, did you not?"

"Home?"

"Yes, you had it when you left the house, and then you went somewhere—don't you remember? Just where did you go?"

The girl, confused once more, seemed almost in fear of him now, for she drew back slowly, and the eagerness was all gone as she said:

"No—home—I don't know. Please let me go."

"I shall not detain you, if I am unable to help you," Dr. Bowen smiled. "But—where did you go that day?"

"Day?" the girl breathed with never a sign of understanding; and then, shrinking farther from him, she muttered: "No, I want to go alone, please. I want to go and find it all alone. I want to find it."

One last perplexed, frightened stare, and Miss Catterson shook her head decidedly and turned away from him swiftly. The conversation was over. The hunt, as strange a chase as was afoot in Brooklyn that evening, was on again and the way still led along the high iron fence.

Well, at last he had spoken with her and been given an external suggestion of her purpose, with whatever ill success. Dr. Bowen, following at a judicious distance, secure in the knowledge that she had forgotten his very existence again by this time, cursed his lack of foresight in neglecting the nervous diseases.

Miss Catterson, by the way, seemed upon a fresh trail. Her pace had grown swifter and more purposeful; she was past the iron gate down there, and the steps that led to the high stone tower, and hurrying beside the board fence. She came to the corner and stood there without turning—and this locality at least,

with its big white arch and its plaza, Dr. Bowen could identify.

This was Prospect Park, and there was a very strong chance, indeed, that the infernal box might be hidden beneath a bush, somewhere in its very extensive depths. Yes, that seemed to be it, because the girl was preparing to cross the street—or no, it was not, for she had stepped out merely to take another car.

Dr. Bowen smiled faintly as he scurried after. Here was his old friend, the Flatbush Avenue trolley, once more, and luckily enough, not one of the steel cars with the middle door that would have precluded any hiding of one entering passenger from another. This was one of the cross-seat variety, and Miss Catterson was making for her favorite spot well forward, while Dr. Jim selected the corner of the platform that was beginning to seem like home.

And so another nickel had gone into the till of the B. R. T. His fingers, fumbling the remaining coins, found half a dollar, a quarter, and a dime, and Dr. Bowen shuddered.

What if the girl contemplated a ride on a railroad train? There was a station down in this direction somewhere; he had seen it when he left the subway. What if she elected to buy a ticket that cost more than one dollar and eighty-five cents? To that extreme limit of his resources he would stick doggedly, but if she went beyond it he would have the task of going back to Catterson and reporting complete failure!

"Say! The railroad station — where is it?" he asked suddenly of the conductor after many agitated minutes of riding.

"Long Island? We passed it. Get off and walk back three blocks."

"I don't want to go there; I just wanted to know," the man from Hallas explained, with a sigh of relief, and turned from the astonished stare to watch Miss Catterson's slim shoulders again.

They were taking a considerable ride this time. They came to the end of Flatbush Avenue and rumbled on into Brooklyn's denser business section and still on; over there was the Borough Hall, which he remembered, and the tall, light-complexioned office building he recalled as—

Dr. Bowen stepped off suddenly. The car had stopped on a loop and all hands were leaving.

Helen Catterson, fixed stare straight ahead, with all the futile earnestness of the deranged, seemed firmly decided on her latest course. Her shadow glancing up at the sign as they passed from the square into the wide, quiet street, observed that they were headed down Montague Street now and smiled grimly.

If he gained nothing else from the evening, and this kind of chase went on until midnight, he would at least have acquired a working knowledge of Brooklyn. Perhaps it was destiny. Perhaps, if Catterson's five hundred for any reason failed to materialize, some one was going to offer him a job driving a wagon around the town he could not leave.

Perhaps, it occurred to Dr. Bowen as they topped the rise and he looked ahead, they were to walk across the East River and visit Manhattan.

Boat lights were moving around, out there on the dark water, and whistles blowing, and the smell of the river came to his nostrils. Down this way, once upon a time, Brooklyn's aristocracy had lived and had its being. Massive old homes were everywhere, some of them converted to business purposes, some of them dark, some of them lighted.

They stretched away to right and left at every crossing, and some of the largest were to be inspected more closely, it seemed; for when the choice lay between walking down to the water-front or turning aside, Miss Catterson made briskly down the last cross-street and hurried ahead.

Once more she was seeking something! James Bowen, M. D., taking up some of the distance between them, concluded that it was house-numbers this time. Twice she stopped for an instant and then moved on.

The third time, as Dr. Jim dropped back a little to avoid attracting her attention, she stopped short before a mighty, dark old mansion with a space at either side, and a glimpse of Manhattan's lighted office buildings far beyond. She nodded, too, and walked directly to the door.

And, although Dr. Bowen could have sworn that she neither rapped nor rang, the door opened as she reached the topmost step, and Miss Catterson, without a backward glance, vanished within!

CHATER IX.

THE BIG HOUSE.

FAR off, a big steamer blew two long blasts. Nearer at hand, a tug-boat squeaked shrilly. The sounds died out together and tremendous stillness fell upon all things in Dr. Bowen's neighborhood.

For downright chilling calm, it seemed to him, he had never encountered anything quite like this residential neighborhood at night. Half a minute ago Helen Catterson's French heels had been clicking softly along the pavements, quite absorbing him; now the sound of them was gone and the world was empty.

Only for a few seconds, however, did Dr. Jim indulge his sentimental loneliness. The girl had passed beyond his vision, which was not at all in Catterson's contract; she was in the big house, and what sort of place the big house might be was beyond any guessing.

Dr. Bowen looked about quickly in the hope of finding some local wanderer who might give information; there was not a soul in sight. He turned his gaze back to the house itself, and the chilled sensation within him grew.

It was not a reassuring place to look at. It was massive and old, and very dark, indeed; one swift glance showed that not a single window in the house was lighted, and through the little transom above the old-fashioned solid wood front door only the smallest illumination showed.

But she was in there, and his place, both by inclination and agreement, was in there, too! With no definite plan at all, with no idea of what he meant to say, Dr. Bowen moved suddenly to the door and tried the knob.

It was, rather naturally, locked on the other side. He hesitated, shrugged his shoulders, and pressed the electric button, more than a little fearful that there would be no response at all.

In this, however, he was pleasantly disappointed. He had hardly more than caught the faint and distant tinkle of the bell than a chain rattled on the other side of the door, a lock snapped back, and the old-fashioned door opened wide. Dr. James Bowen, this time, was face to face with a butler.

Heavily built, clad in sober black, as wooden of expression as any doll, the middle-aged man showed no surprise whatever at sight of him. One might, in fact, have fancied that he was expecting James Bowen, for he nodded with what looked like respectful recognition and bowed as he stepped back and murmured:

"Step in, sir, if you please."

"Er—what? All right," Dr. Jim muttered, and lowered his voice. "There was a young lady who came in here a minute or two ago, and—"

"Quite so, sir," the butler interrupted. "Will you be so good as to step this way, sir?"

"But—"

"Right this way, sir, if you please," the man repeated, opening the high sliding door at the right and entering, to snap on several of the lights and reveal a wide, old-fashioned drawing-room, well-filled with furniture, of which every last piece was slip-covered.

As a reception, it was odd enough to be sure! The fellow seemed to understand the unheralded call thoroughly as —or more thoroughly than—Dr. Bowen himself. He took the visitor's hat and

coat, and was backing out with them as Dr. Jim said suddenly:

"She's not in here?"

"No, sir."

"May I—er—see her, please?"

"I will ascertain, sir," the butler murmured, disappearing without drawing a sound from the deep-piled carpets!

In here the stillness was even more oppressive than outdoors! The air was thick and heavy and stale, too, as if the house had been closed for years—and yet that could hardly be, with servants in the place, and Miss Catterson walking in as a matter of course.

Dr. Bowen, scowling in his perplexity, dropped into the depths of a big chair and looked out.

What sort of place was it, anyway? A private residence, of course, and one of wealthy people; and peculiar people, too, for they did not use their home. Dr. Jim's forefinger, moving over the slip-cover at his side, came away with a quantity of fine dust on the tip. He studied it thoughtfully for several minutes and sought the answer; he ended by shrugging his shoulders once more.

After all, of what concern was it to him how the owners of the place attended to their housekeeping? His object here—well, just what was his object here, anyway? To learn the girl's whereabouts, he supposed, and, if necessary, explain to the family that she was mentally not herself.

Or, perhaps, by a question or two, to learn that she had hidden Catterson's box in the home of their friends or—

Dr. Bowen started frankly at the sight of the butler.

"Beg pardon, sir, will you be good enough to wait," that person murmured.

"Miss Catterson is in the house?"

"Yes, sir."

"Will she—er—see me?"

"I'm not at liberty to state, sir. My instructions are to request you to wait, if you please."

"Is she—all right?" asked Dr. Bowen.

"I believe so, sir," said the sober one.

He was backing out again. The physician from Hallas, staring at him, spoke rather sharply:

"Well, wait a minute, you! I want to know more about Miss Catterson, please. Is this the house of some of her friends?"

"I am not at liberty to state, sir."

"What? Why not?"

"My orders are to the contrary, sir."

"Hang your orders! I want to know where I am and—see here! Take my card to the—er—mistress of the house and say that I ask the favor of a five minute chat, will you?"

"No, sir," the butler said steadily, and shook his head, with the faintest smile of apology.

"Well, why can't you do that?" Dr. Bowen demanded blankly.

"I am not at liberty to state, sir," the butler repeated.

"Isn't the lady at home?"

"I am not at liberty to state, sir."

Dr. James Bowen smiled tartly.

"Is that all you're able to say?" he snapped.

"Beg pardon, sir, it may seem extraordinary to you, sir, but those are my orders," the other said imperturbably. "I'm instructed to ask you, sir, if you'll be good enough to wait. That was all, sir."

"Wait for what?"

"I couldn't say, sir."

Dr. Bowen threw up his hands in exasperation.

"Very well, then; I'll wait," he said. "And meanwhile, whatever your orders happen to be, take my card to the lady of the house—or the master of the house, if there is no lady—and say that it is really urgent that I talk to her or to him. You understand that?"

"Perfectly, sir," replied the wooden one, as he accepted the card and backed toward the door again. "I've left the evening papers on the table there, sir, if you'd care to see them."

Once more he vanished, card in hand. Dr. Jim, whistling a little tune through his excellent teeth, smiled at the dusty magnificence and waited for a time.

Whoever lived here would see him, of course, unless they chanced to be downright eccentric. At the end of ten minutes, he decided that it would be a woman, because the normal man would have been down before this, while the normal lady, in the nature of things, would have to dress.

At the end of twenty minutes, however, he had ceased smiling and even essayed a trip to the hall door, by way of looking about. There was absolutely nothing to be seen, save an empty, expensively furnished hall.

Dr. Bowen returned to his chair and glanced at his watch. To the best of his figuring he had been there half an hour; he was irritated and worried, and, having relaxed somewhat in the stillness, tired and hungry as well.

He had put in a trying day, and as trying as any other part of it was the task of sitting here and wondering what was happening to Helen Catterson. He could not, in ordinary decency, go hunting for her through somebody's house. He turned to the evening papers and discovered that he had no mind for them; subconsciously his attention had drifted to the soft sounds coming from somewhere else on the floor.

Somebody was moving around now, evidently in the next room. Dr. Bowen fell to listening, and, after a little, he caught the faint clinking of silverware and the occasional chink of china. The family was real and material enough to eat, at any rate; those muffled clinkings told of a belated clearing up of the dinner things.

Rather hungrily, Dr. Jim's thoughts wandered back to such elemental things as roast beef and the chickens his housekeeper had cooked so deliciously when, as happened all too frequently, they came in lieu of cash for professional services rendered. There had been baked Indian pudding, too, and—

Dr. Bowen looked suddenly to the door at the far end of the room, which had opened with a loud squeak.

The butler, expressionless as ever, was standing there, head inclined respectfully.

"Beg pardon, sir," he said in the most matter-of-fact way possible. "Dinner is served, sir!"

CHAPTER X.

ODDITIES MULTIPLY.

LET it not be assumed that Dr. Bowen's sudden rising denoted any forgetfulness of Helen Catterson or his mission in the queer house. Rather the suddenness was born of an eagerness to see her again—because, as Dr. Bowen imagined for a fond ten seconds, many things had cleared themselves in that simple announcement.

The family, of course, dined late. They understood Helen's condition; they had not felt inclined to explain it to their butler. They had been preparing for dinner and the ladies had been keeping Helen with them as a matter of course—and now that dinner-time had come they would tell him, in whatever guarded way seemed fitting, just how matters stood.

In the doorway, though, Dr. Jim's smile vanished suddenly. The dining-room was big enough to seat thirty people comfortably; a dozen could have dined at the big, round table in the center. Yet although he saw silver and china and shining glass and a pair of candles, they were as a little dinner oasis in a desert of white linen: a single place had been set at the far side of the table!

"Well—er—" escaped the physician.

"If you please, sir?" said the butler, drawing out his chair.

"Am I to dine alone?"

"If you will, sir."

Once more he indicated the empty chair, and Dr. Bowen walked slowly to its side. The door over there was open; he could see the main hallway of the home and the side of the stairs; by leaning a little he could even see the front door itself.

Miss Catterson, should she make the attempt, could not well leave unperceived;

there was really no reason why he should not dine—if the mysterious household really contemplated offering him a real meal. The puzzled caller, therefore, took his seat and looked after the butler, who had hurried out after handing him his napkin.

Distantly, the clinking was renewed. The man reappeared with a temptingly iced grapefruit, arranged it, and stood aside, and Dr. Bowen looked him over once again.

"See here, my man," he said, "this is quite all right, of course, and I appreciate it, but I want to know more about it."

"We live very simply here, sir, but the fruit—"

"I'm not talking about the fruit. I want to know whose hospitality I'm enjoying?"

"I'm not at liberty to state, sir."

Dr. Jim smiled wearily.

"Don't begin that again!" he said. "And don't feel, by the way, that you're running any risk in answering a question or two, if that's what troubles you," he added softly. "I promise you not to tell that you've been talking."

"Thank you, sir."

"Good! Did you take my card to your mistress?"

"I took your card, sir."

"*To your mistress?*" snapped Dr. Bowen.

"I'm not at lib—"

"Damn that!" the diner cried warmly. "I'm not trying to fathom the secrets of the household, if it has any. I'm not trying to force myself upon them or annoy them. I came here because I have undertaken to look after Miss Catterson's welfare, and with her my concern begins and ends."

"Quite so, sir," the butler said steadily.

"I want to know if she is safe and in good hands—and in whose hands, my man! I'm a physician, and if she needs my attention, I want to give it to her promptly. I want to know how long she contemplates remaining here, and whether she is being cared for properly while she is here, and I want a few words with the person who is caring for her! You understand that, don't you? Well, turn into a human being, then, and say something besides your confounded 'not at liberty to state!'"

The butler, with never a sign of astonishment or animosity, considered him very gravely. So far as one might judge from such a countenance, the man appeared to be thinking. He smiled slightly and there was some apology in his tone.

"I quite understand, sir," said he. "It's most distressing, sir, I'm sure, that my orders are what they are. I'm instructed to say, sir, that the young lady is in the house and quite safe. I'm instructed to ask the honor of your dining here, and the privilege of serving you, sir. But I may say, sir—and I'm sure I crave your pardon—that I'm forbidden absolutely to answer questions of any kind."

"*Why?*"

"And I'm instructed, sir, if you persist in asking them, not to detain you in the house, sir," the butler concluded; and after a wait of three seconds, during which Dr. Bowen merely stared at him, he became as wooden as ever and bowed again, with: "What will your preference be in wines, sir?"

Dr. Jim shook his head, and, for the time being, gave it up.

"None at all," he said briefly.

"Very good, sir," murmured the butler, retiring to the farther wall!

However puzzled its consumer might be, the grapefruit was excellent. Dr. Jim finished it with relish and watched the silent mystery glide away to the door at the rear of the big room. After that, for a considerable time, he waited, watching the door absently, wondering why no suggestion of sound came from the upper part of the house.

This, emphatically, was no quick-lunch establishment. Twenty minutes had passed, with an occasional clink at the back of the house, before the butler reappeared, gravely bearing soup. Five more he spent in arranging things and

serving; then Dr. Bowen was permitted to continue his dinner.

It was not, he discovered, very good soup. There was a lurking suggestion of tin-can in its flavor that did not appeal to the doctor, and caused him to wonder mildly. In a household of this size, canned soup seemed unlikely; and yet—when he had seen another half-hour go to pottering—the fish was not quite up to the mark, either!

It had been decidedly good, two or three hours ago, Dr. Bowen fancied, but if this portion had not been warmed over for his benefit, his sensitive palate was fooling him queerly. Hunger, however, brought him to an empty plate in very short order—and the butler was gone again.

If there was a meat course on the way, the man must be killing the animal. Dr. Jim consulted his watch and found that ten o'clock was only a memory, and that it lacked not so much of eleven! At this rate he bade fair to sit over dinner all night, and when eventually the butler hove in sight again, he said gently:

"Is that the meat?"

"I beg pardon for the delay, sir," mumbled the butler. "The *chef,* sir—"

"All right, never mind. Just bring me a cup of coffee, will you, if there's such a thing about, and we'll call that dinner. I'm not strong on desserts, anyway."

The butler's glance, traveling over him for an instant, was rather odd.

"The *chef,* sir, is preparing a salad which—er—is a favorite of madam's," he suggested.

He served the lonely guest and departed again—and this time Dr. Bowen felt that he had been right in the first place. The whole meal had been cooked hours ago, and this meat had been carved at the same time, too. It was dry and tasteless; and the vegetables with it were even more so.

The curiosity which he had resolved to put aside during dinner insisted on welling up again, and, that section of the meal arriving long after, it was not lessened by the sight of the salad. That favorite dish of "madam's" had been concocted in the most ordinary way and of the most ordinary materials; madam apparently preferred her lettuce wilted around the edges and her salad dressing of such age that the oil separated out again in dismal little drops!

It was queer enough, all of it! Dr. Bowen, at the end of his meal at last, found himself escorted back to the dusty drawing-room and the papers. He sat down in his chair and gazed quizzically at the butler.

"How much longer is this freak business going on?" he asked. "All night?"

"I don't understand, sir."

"We've had enough of it, anyway. Go to Miss Catterson and find out whether she means to pass the night here and—"

"I beg your pardon, sir," the butler interrupted flatly. "I'm very sorry indeed, sir, but it's impossible! It's more than my place is worth to take such a question to—ah—well, to take the message, sir. That's really all, doctor!"

And he walked steadily, majestically back to the dining-room and, expressionless as ever, closed the connecting doors carefully.

Dr. Bowen, lips compressed, stared at the door for a little. What *was* he to do?

Abuse the hospitality of the household, such as it was, by forcing his way past the butler, and inspecting the upper stories himself? Hardly. Leave, then, and look the place over from the outside, in the hope of discerning Miss Catterson somewhere above?

There was even less sense to that notion, for he might never be able to enter again. On the face of the things, his one best bet was merely—to wait!

There is such a thing as dozing restfully with one eye wide open and attentive. Dr. Bowen had cultivated the faculty perforce, through many weary nights passed at sick bedsides. He had no fear at all that, should he elect to do a little dozing now, any one could pass down-stairs and out of the house without his knowledge.

Hence, after the tenth consecutive tre-

mendous yawn, Dr. Bowen dragged his chair straight to the open door of the drawing-room and, the stairway not four yards distant, settled down comfortably.

There was something almost narcotic about the stillness of the house and the neighborhood at this hour. His tired, worried being lulled slowly and he hunched down farther, an undignified physician, but one wearing a faint smile.

At the worst, he could pass the night here and take up the chase in the morning rather disheveled, but rested enough. He stretched his legs straight out and folded his arms and yawned again.

And presently he roused with a start.

Nothing had happened—of that he felt quite certain—but a certain sense of much time passed lurked in his mind. If the girl had any idea at all of leaving, she must be moving now, because it must be past midnight.

Dr. Jim, dragging out his watch again, blinked at it and became quite wide awake.

It was just two o'clock in the morning!

CHAPTER XI.

TRAPPED.

SOME day an analytical psychologist will explain to us in words of one syllable the nameless spell of the very early morning hours—why it is that, if we came home last night at twelve it was merely an ordinary evening, whereas if we returned at half past one we grin over a pleasantly disreputable memory next morning—why it is that the telephone, ringing before midnight or after sunrise, is merely a bother, while if it chooses to explode at three in the morning, a different horrible premonition comes with every stroke of the bell.

Dr. Bowen, before he quite meant to rise, was on his feet and looking around with a scowl.

The whole affair, beginning at Catterson's home, had been queer enough before, Heaven knew! But what sort of family was this, anyway, that permitted him to drowse in its drawing-room until two in the morning?

That they were not exactly normal he had suspected, but this performance classified them as downright odd—or worse. Why had not somebody come to explain that Miss Catterson had decided to remain through the night, the butler if nobody else? If it came to that, why had that sober being dropped out of existence?

He had not passed this way. Dr. Jim, entirely acquainted with his own manner of taking rest, could vouch for that; if the man had even closed a door within his normal hearing, he would have been awake.

And just where was Miss Helen herself, whom he had undertaken to watch? Dr. Bowen, feeling a little, cool thrill creep down his spine, walked into the broad hall and listened.

The grave could have been no more silent than the house in which he had dined. The air seemed heavier, too; it was downright unbreathable, and his lungs, accustomed to much oxygen, felt clogged and stifled. He yearned for a dozen deep inhalations of outdoor air before going further, and since the family could not well object to his opening one of their windows, he strode across the thick carpet and forced up the creaking catch that held the inner shutters.

He turned them back—and having done so, Dr. Jim's astonished little exclamation rumbled through the place.

Behind those shutters, between himself and the outer pane, the window was tightly boarded!

Dr. Bowen's quick hand went out to confirm the evidence of his eyes; it was a move quite unnecessary. The boarding was nailed in fast and it had been there for months; as he pushed at its unyielding surface, fine dust puffed from the cracks. And the significance of that little discovery was as plain as the nose on his face and a good deal more startling: this was somebody's home, but somebody was not living here now!

Momentarily, the effect upon James Bowen, M.D., was not unlike an actual blow. For a little, he had fancied that his new policy of push and punch and grabbing what came within reach was likely to carry him farther than the old methods. Instead, it had landed him in a deserted mansion and—or it couldn't be a deserted mansion, because there was a butler, and Miss Catterson had come here to see some one!

And then, on the other hand, it must be a deserted mansion; the girl had merely entered it and, for all he knew to the contrary, had gone into thin air. The butler had served him an indifferent dinner, and apparently had followed her out to nowhere by the fourth dimension route! Or perhaps—Dr. Bowen stared back at the incontestably genuine electric lights and took a firm grip on his wits!

Taking too much for granted, it really seemed that he had made a considerable ass of himself. His part, in here at two in the morning, was not to stand there forming hypotheses that led nowhere; his job was to find out just what had become of Helen Catterson.

Whatever the circumstances, one does not roam through a strange, possibly occupied, dwelling alone at such an hour. He would have to have help and approval in the shape of a conventional, uniformed policeman, and although it might take time and patience to lay the situation before that individual, the quicker Dr. Bowen secured his help the better. He peered about with eyes grown decidedly keener, and marched straight for the front door of the inexplicable home.

There was a heavy chain, which he remembered the butler putting up again after he had entered; there was a bolt, too, and Dr. Bowen undid both of them swiftly and reached down for the big key he also remembered.

It was absent. He gazed at the empty keyhole for an instant, pushed back the spring latch, and turned the knob.

The door remained quite as tightly closed as before!

Dr. Bowen, crouching, examined the crack of the door, and rose again quite suddenly and looked back of him. There was no mistake about that absent key, at any rate; it had been removed deliberately, leaving a thick brass bolt that would have taken twenty minutes to cut with a hack-saw, between himself and the outer world!

Two or three minutes, the gentleman from Hallas remained as he was. There seemed no use in mincing matters: they had locked him in, had had him locked in doubtless since the moment of his first entrance, because the butler had spent some seconds fumbling over the door after admitting him.

And who were " they," and where were they now, and, ever most important, what had they done to Helen?

Dr. Bowen, decidedly the whiter, set his teeth and walked down the hall to the dark doorway of the dining-room. His course was settled now. For a beginning, he would search the house from top to bottom, roof and cellar included if necessary; after that, if his horrible suspicion of the home's present complete emptiness was justified, he would break out one of the windows and get to the police, and then—he struck a match and looked for the wall-push. He jabbed it, and turned warily to the dining-room, flooded now with light.

It was perfectly empty. From the table the cloth had vanished and all other signs of his meal. He gazed at it for a moment and strode on; and this place, with the little stairs running down into blackness, was the pantry, and likewise unoccupied.

Later, very likely, he would have to investigate the below-stairs gloom; first he would cover the main floor. Dr. Bowen, therefore, moved into the corridor, and, match over head, walked through the pitchy doorway on the other side.

The push-button this time was almost under his hand, and further electric radiance flashed upon the place.

Dr. Jim, set of countenance, smiled abruptly! This was their library, and

boarded up like the rest of the house, but —there stood the telephone! There, upon the big table, rested the straight path to the whole world outside these walls!

He chuckled aloud, and fairly raced at it, and it was in his hands and the receiver at his ear before he had quite decided whom he wished to call.

The police, of course—or might it not be better to get into communication with Catterson himself, make a full report, and ask further orders? There was no telephone directory in sight, but the information girl would give him Catterson's number.

Dr. Jim, growing impatient, clicked the hook up and down and listened again. Telephone service in Brooklyn, it seemed, was exceptionally poor at night. He waited the better part of a minute; and then, since not even a hum came from the instrument, pounded again upon the hook.

Silence, heavy and unrelieved as that of the house itself, was all that came to his ear.

Nor did it impress him as merely odd. On any telephone line there are always sounds of some sort—whispers, faint buzzings, little clicks and raps. Dr. Bowen held the instrument a little farther off and examined it; it was real enough, with its green cord running off somewhere under the table.

Once more he tried the hook; and having pumped up and down until he was weary and listened again without result, Dr. Jim grunted, and set out on a hunt for the bell-box and the inlet of the line, because long disuse in a house where there were doubtless plenty of rats and mice might have resulted in a broken wire.

Angry at the delay, however cheered he might be at the presence of the instrument itself, Dr. Bowen's fingers went down the green cord and under the table to follow its further course. He frowned. Also, he squatted suddenly on the floor, and then, with a tug, he brought the short length of cord loose from the staple which had secured it to the under side of the table.

A snarl, and he straightened up again with the wretched instrument in his hand, paused, tossed it to the couch, and turned the heavy table on its side. Aside from the staple, hastily driven, not so much as a tack had ever touched that under expanse of costly wood; there was never a sign of wire nor had there ever been. His brief dream of communication with the outer world was over.

Receiver, transmitter, and all had been left there to fool him or to fool some one else or because the absent eccentric who owned the place liked the sight of them, or for Heaven only knew what other reason, and—what was *that*, by the way?

On tiptoe, Dr. Jim, speeding back to the corridor, was at the foot of the stairs before the sound came again, muffled and thick, but unquestionably the sound of a woman weeping bitterly, off in the Egyptian darkness above.

CHAPTER XII.

FOUND.

OUT in the open, the practitioner from Hallas could locate noises very promptly and accurately. In here he knew only that this one seemed to hang on the thick air, somewhere up-stairs. His nerves were near to getting the better of him, too, as he listened; his teeth gritted and his eyes glared excitedly; and the weeping died out in a last, low, trembling wail, and the oppressive quiet was on the place once more.

But it was Helen! Knowing nothing at all about it, he was still perfectly certain of that! It was Helen, and in real distress; and having settled so much in the first two seconds of the quiet, Dr. Jim bounded upward, pounced from the head of the flight to level flooring again, and stopped short, rather painfully aware that he was ignorant of the second story's geography.

Either over that way—or over there—or, no, it had seemed rather to come from *that* direction! Dr. Bowen lighted another of his matches and thanked fortune

for the incandescent bracket just within reach.

He gazed about again and selected the farther door. He opened it and stepped in swiftly and with a cheerful disregard of the sleeper who might possibly lie beyond.

The faint rays from the corridor showed him the fixture in here quickly enough. He snapped on the lights and, almost immediately, shook his head. It was a bedroom, but it had been long without a tenant.

The bare spring was covered only by a sheet, and the same canvas slips appeared on the larger pieces of furniture. He turned away from it all and hurried back to the upper corridor—and a hoarse shout escaped him as he came face to face with the butler once more!

The servant showed no sign at all of having slept or of having even contemplated retiring. He was fully dressed and wide awake; one extremely quick glance, Dr. Bowen fancied, was shot at him by the small eyes, but the man seemed altogether without expression again as he demanded:

"Where's Miss Catterson?"

"Beg pardon, sir?" the man asked stupidly.

"Cut out that nonsense now, my man!" Dr. Jim said sharply. "I don't know the answer to all this, and I haven't time to look for it now, but—where is Miss Catterson?"

The butler gazed up at him almost resignedly for a moment—gazed over his shoulder and then down-stairs; and then he came closer to the all-night guest and his voice dropped oddly:

"Beg pardon, sir," he breathed, "but will you step up-stairs for a bit?"

"What?"

"Up to my room, sir, if you please. It—it ain't safe talking here, I think, and I'd like to explain."

"Explain what?"

"The whole thing, sir, orders or no orders," the butler said quickly. "I can't stand no more of it, sir. I'm scared to death myself, sir! I'm that cold frightened that it seems—"

"No, you're not; you're just lying," and Dr. Bowen's smile was curious as he looked more closely into the man's face. "I could tell you about two dozen symptoms of a man who's frightened to death, and you haven't an indication of one of them. You're trying to put over some idiocy, and it doesn't go. Now—where is Miss Catterson?"

The butler's eyes dropped.

"I couldn't say, sir," he said doggedly.

"You only think you can't!" Dr. Bowen assured him as he gripped the thick throat and jammed its owner against the wall in rather less than a second! "I'll prove to you that you can. Going to make a fight of it, eh?"

He set his feet more firmly and tightened his grip as somebody's butler sought in vain to deliver a very nasty uppercut. He smiled again, did Dr. Bowen, and there was something in the smile which caused the butler's eyes to loiter on his own.

"You strike me just once and I'll snap your windpipe in two with this thumb and finger—feel 'em?" he said impressively. "I'm a doctor, you know, and I know just how to finish you with one twist. Now, for the last time, where is Miss Catterson? You can't talk—just point!"

Whatever his speech may have lacked in anatomical soundness, the dramatic effect had not failed! The butler, open mouth struggling for speech, popping eyes wild with genuine fright, sought to shake his head and failed. The fingers tightened suggestively—and past their grip came a strangling:

"There! There! There, doc!"

His hand was thrusting wildly toward the rear of the house, and Dr. Bowen's grip relaxed.

"I'll take you with me until I see whether you're lying," he said quietly. "If you're not, get out of my way and keep out, because I'll kill you next time! And if you are, I think I'll finish you,

anyway," he added pleasantly. "Which door? This one? Open it!"

His steel fingers wound about the butler's arm suggestively. Somebody's servant, with more energy than he had hitherto displayed, turned the knob and pushed back the door. In the lighted room Helen Catterson rose from her chair and looked vacantly at them.

"Get out!" Dr. Bowen said briefly as he swung the man aside.

The butler, evidently, was of the reasoning sort that knows when to quit. His hand upon his throat, he looked at Dr. Bowen for an instant and then backed off; and the door closed in his face as Dr. Jim noted with huge relief that the girl seemed quite as he had seen her last.

She had been weeping in the causeless fashion that might have been expected; her handkerchief was rolled into a little ball in her palm. But that phase had passed now, and she even smiled vaguely at her alleged protector as he led her, unresisting, back to her chair and drew another to her side.

Was it credible that she had simply been up here all this time, sitting alone? There seemed nothing else to assume. And what crazy kind of establishment was it that had admitted her, even without a ring at the door and—but he had deferred hunting for the answer, had he not? Dr. Bowen in his gentlest voice said:

"Have you been here all alone?'

"Been here," the girl repeated blankly. "I want—I want—what do I want?"

The helpless smile rested steadily on him.

"The box? Did you find the box?" Dr. Jim suggested.

"No! The box—that was it—the box!" the girl cried, with that same sudden flash of understanding. "It isn't here."

"You've remembered where it is?" asked Dr. Jim.

"Yes, I—I know now!" she said quickly, earnestly. "I want to go there and find the box."

"Can't you tell me where it is?"

"No, I—want to go there!" the girl persisted. "I want to go myself and find it. Can't we go?"

Momentarily Dr. Jim was quite absorbed in the study of her. It seemed downright unbelievable that the girl was mentally affected; there was not visible a single minor indication such as a year's derangement should have left for the practised eye to find. Had it been a new hysterical affection of some sort, he could have understood well enough, but—well, he had never wandered far into the neurological mysteries.

"We can go, if you will let me accompany you," he said.

"Oh, yes," the girl answered, smiling mild astonishment. "Why not? Can we go at once, please? I want to go to—to the box. I—know now!"

She rose again, impatiently, and picked up the hat and coat which were lying on the covered toilet table. Dr. Bowen, wisely silent, assisted her with the coat, and she thanked him in the most rational fashion and moved toward the stairs.

Silently still, since a chance word was likely enough to upset the delicate balance, the doctor kept closely to her as she descended—and just then they were face to face with the butler, standing with his back to the front door.

"Open it!" Dr. Bowen commanded in a whisper.

"I'm sorry, sir—upon my soul, I am! —but I can't, sir. I haven't the key, doctor."

"Who has?"

"Another party, sir, and I can't get it —not if you kill me!"

Miss Catterson's smile had disappeared and she was looking wonderingly from one to the other. Dr. Jim breathed hard.

"Is there a back door?" he asked.

"Down-stairs, sir, and straight through, but—"

He was still speaking when Dr. Bowen turned the girl and walked her down the corridor and to the stairs. There would be a front door down there, too, for that matter, and if one of them failed the other

could be forced—or battered down, if he could impress the unfortunate girl with the idea that it was some sort of joke and no cause for alarm.

Why the inscrutable forces of this musty palace had to manifest themselves again just when Helen Catterson was calm was beyond his guessing; but they were down now and ready for the trial.

And the newest match was not out of Dr. Bowen's pocket when the big, unsuspected door beside them opened and bathed the lower hall in light from the billiard room! Two men were in there and on their feet—one who might have been the second man and the other was in chauffeur's livery.

They had been playing cards on a large wooden chair; cigarettes smoked on the edge, and there was a half-emptied beer bottle at either side; but the game had been suspended now, and the ugly-looking chauffeur had stepped before Dr. Bowen.

"On your way out?" he asked briskly.

"I think so."

"Take another think, boss; there's nothing doing," said the chauffeur. "Back right up and go up-stairs again before anything rough starts! That's orders!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE WAY OUT.

NATURALLY patient and even-tempered, Dr. Jim's patience was sorely tried during the few seconds in which he stood face to face with the liveried gentleman.

He could lick that man! And the odd man was small enough to be negligible, however wiry his build. And when he had finished licking them both Helen Catterson would have attained a pitch of hysteria amounting to mania, in all probability; her hand on his arm was shaking now as she asked:

"Can't we go?"

"Er—a little later," Dr. Bowen said with difficulty.

"I want to go now."

"Git up there again, mister," the chauffeur put in. "You got no business down here. You couldn't get out in a year till we're ordered to—"

"Let it go at that!" Dr. Jim snapped. for the hand was trembling more markedly. "We'll go up again."

"Up where?" the girl asked, as they climbed once more.

In the main corridor and headed toward the front of the house the butler was just passing.

"To the room we left, I think," Dr. Jim said distinctly. "I'm afraid that we shall have to stay there until they're ready to turn us loose."

"But I want to go," the girl persisted. "When can we go?"

"Very likely in the morning," her protector answered sadly, as they passed the man in the hall.

He did not follow when they had ascended the second flight. He failed to see the grim and determined smile which came to Dr. Bowen's features as he closed the door of the room. He missed the picture of the doctor holding both Miss Catterson's hands and looking fixedly into her troubled eyes while he said very gently:

"Listen to me, please, and pay attention to every word. Will you do that, please?"

"Why—yes!"

"I'm going to get you out of here and take you wherever you want to go," he said slowly and confidently. "I want you to sit here just as you are and wait for me to come back. Don't follow me; just sit here. And then we can go."

The girl nodded submissively.

"I may be gone for a little while, but I'll come back and then we'll start," Dr. Bowen repeated, rising and smiling down on her. "Just sit still."

One trait that should have made for his far greater success in life was his innate resourcefulness. Many a time Dr. Bowen had gone right on after all hope had vanished, trying this drug when that

had failed, discarding the routine and going to lengths of his own, and very frequently with success.

There are more ways than one of saving patients; there are more ways of leaving a house than dynamiting out the front wall.

Although as yet he had not a remote idea of just how this house was to be left behind, Dr. Jim smiled pensive confidence as he strolled across the room and examined a dusty little picture. A minute or more he studied it, whistling softly; then he turned from the print because the idea —however risky and far-fetched, undoubtedly the only possible idea with the odds three against one—had arrived!

It was a melodramatic idea, with a superb chance of failure; if it fell flat he would have to conjure up another scheme, but the tools of this one were too handy to be neglected.

Dr. Bowen moved over to the basin and turned on the water; mud and rust spurted for a little and then the clear fluid appeared.

And now he would have to see. He reached into his back pocket for the black case that had lived there twelve years or more, and for a little while only gentle humming and the sound of running water came from the nook that held the basin. One slim little vial of pellets he emptied into his right hand and thence into the cash-pocket of his coat. He tapped his vest-pocket and found another little black case.

"What are you doing?" the girl asked.

"Just monkeying with a hypodermic," Dr. Jim smiled over his shoulder.

"I don't want drugs!"

"You're not going to get any from me, child," the physician assured her, turning off the water and stepping toward the door with one hand partly closed. "Now, you are to sit here and wait and don't be frightened if—er—you hear a little noise!"

"I shall not be frightened," the girl said dully.

It was evident that he had selected the right moment for leaving the room. The sleepless butler of the tenantless house was just coming up-stairs again, and he paused and looked sharply at Dr. Jim after the first glance at his face.

A little child could have seen that Dr. Jim's spirit had been chastened by the discovery down-stairs; he regarded the butler with a smile that was rueful and rather scared, and he asked:

"I didn't—hurt you much, did I?"

"You nearly killed me, sir—that was all."

"I'm sorry," sighed Dr. Bowen. "I didn't know that things were quite as complicated and mysterious in this house as they seem to be. What does it all mean, anyway?"

"I offered to tell you once, sir," said the butler.

"I didn't appreciate the offer then; I do now," the visitor smiled forlornly. "If it is still good, I'd like to know what under the sun I'm up against."

Somebody's servant peered at him again and himself smiled faintly.

"You'll have to come up to my room, sir," he said. "I'll take no chance of being overheard by those other fellows down there."

"Lead the way!" Dr. Bowen directed.

The butler paused to look over the banister rail and down-stairs; satisfied, he started up the next flight and Dr. Jim tagged drearily behind. Up they went, and, walking to the rear, up once more to the half-story that was evidently servants' quarters. Into a little square room, with a few pieces of furniture and a legitimately made bed, somebody's butler led Dr. Bowen—and the infinitesimal creak of the key being drawn from the lock came to the doctor's ear, but brought no change in his smile as he turned on the light.

The servant gazed at him quizzically.

"Well, you see, sir," he began hesitatingly, "it's like this. I don't know that I have all the particulars, but—"

"Why, confound it all!" Dr. Bowen broke in, stepping forward suddenly and

scowling at the other. "I've strained your sterno-mastoid!"

"*What?*" cried somebody's butler, paling slightly.

"The big muscle in the side of your neck, man!" the doctor said with swiftly growing concern. "Here! Get your coat off!"

"For what?"

"So that I can massage it into shape again before the real swelling sets in. Hurry up! I can catch it now, but if you're going to back away like that you'll not be able to move your head for six weeks or more. Lord! I never meant to do that. That's it—get off your coat and undo your collar," Dr. Bowen pursued earnestly. "Sit down here on the edge of the bed, where I can get at you more easily!"

For the time being the good doctor had laid his supply of ethics away in lavender; there was genuine conviction in his tone and manner, however, and the servant, after a long, rather scared stare, slipped out of his coat and undid his collar and, after another hesitating moment, perched on the edge of the bed.

"Say, sir—" he began.

"Say nothing!" Dr. Bowen retorted cheerfully, as he pitched headlong on the man and sent him flat on the bed.

Irresistibly his big left hand went round the butler's head, closing firmly over the mouth and holding down the upper half of him! Two fingers of his right hand slid underneath the collar-band of the shirt and tore it away bodily, leaving much bare skin.

And stifled beneath the hand the most astonishing wild yell of pain failed to reach the outer world, because with more energy than care Dr. Bowen's hypodermic needle had entered the butler's anatomy and done its work.

For some fifteen or twenty seconds it seemed that the butler would succeed in breaking loose, for he squirmed and kicked in a fashion really maniacal. The large body of the doctor was upon him, however; and presently, as he jammed the sober countenance into the covers, Bowen was able to say distinctly:

"Lie still! D'ye hear me? Lie still if you want to come out of it alive! I've given you a double shot of the stuff we save for tremens cases, and ten minutes from now there won't be a wiggle in you, my friend!

"We try to hold 'em down as a rule, after that dose, until it takes effect, but you're at perfect liberty to struggle if you like. Frequently they die when they struggle hard enough, but—that part's up to you."

And he smiled at the back of the butler's head. It was plain that the fellow had never studied medicine, anyway; he was relaxing in the most obedient fashion. With a jerk Dr. Bowen turned him over. The man was frightened; nay, he was scared through and through and up and down.

"I'm going to leave you here," the man from Hallas said, rising warily. "If you're careful of your health you'll wake up about noon somewhat heavy and stupid, but still likely to die of old age. If you move from that bed before I go, I'll knock you out with this fist—see it? And if you want to kick around and raise Cain when I've gone, that's your lookout. If you have a chance to realize it, you'll be tremendously astonished at the sudden way you stop!"

Nor had somebody's butler moved as yet. Dr. Bowen stooped swiftly and recovered the key from under the little table. Then he departed with the abruptness of a lightning flash and the key rattled in the door even as it slammed shut.

After that, for a minute or more, Dr. Bowen listened. Should the butler elect to go mad with fright and kick about, it would not matter greatly; this room, into which he had no doubt at all that he himself was to have been locked, was pleasantly distant from the rest of the house.

But the butler was not kicking about. He was weeping strangely, with the grief

of pure terror—and Dr. Bowen trotted down-stairs contentedly.

He would not weep for long!

CHAPTER XIV.

THE LUCK OF BEING A DOCTOR.

SO the butler was settled, at any rate! Dr. Jim, pausing again on the second floor, gave another minute to listening before he hurried toward the door of the girl's musty room.

She was walking about now, and he tiptoed to the crack and looked in anxiously. She was smiling, too, and her color was up again—and as she turned toward him Dr. Bowen's perplexed frown came back.

Was she demented? Could any one with a smile like that be demented? Why, her eyes were perfectly rational, too, and he could have sworn that she was thinking pleasantly and coherently.

He stepped into the room quite suddenly—and he saw that he had erred. The eyes, on closer viewing, were quite vague and startled. They looked at him wonderingly as she asked:

"Can we go now?"

"We can go in another half hour if I have as good luck down-stairs as I've had up," Dr. Jim answered. "You were going to sit still?"

"Was I?" the girl murmured, returning to her chair. "Very well."

"And this time I want you to remain quite still and leave the door closed, whatever you may hear. You'll do that?"

"Oh, yes, I'll do that," Miss Catterson answered monotonously, nodding gravely. "And then we can go?"

"Then we can go," Dr. Jim sighed, moving into the corridor again.

As to this latter part of his idea, which dealt with two men rather than one, he was in some doubt. The essentials were all on hand, for the evening papers still lay in the drawing-room and there were plenty of matches still in his box. Dr Bowen, after a slow and pensive descent through the tomblike stillness, secured the evening papers and moved away through the dining-room and into the butler's pantry.

At a guess, the little stairway in here would lead directly down to the kitchen. It lay a good thirty feet to the rear of the other stairway, too, which suggested a room between the kitchen itself and the billiard-room at the front. The adventurer, therefore, thanking his stars for the rubber-heel habit, descended into the blackness, and, ever so softly, lighted a match.

He had guessed well, indeed! This was the kitchen and the door over that way led into a storeroom, for it was open and he could discern the mistiest hint of shelves. And this door at the side let into the basement hallway, and at the far end of it the light from the billiard-room shone brightly.

Listening, he caught a raspingly hummed popular air, and above it:

"Come on! Come on, kid! Standing pat?"

The humming ceased.

"Gimme two cards!" said the hummer.

They were busy. Dr. Jim asked nothing better. Even the humming was resumed, which meant that he could scratch two or three more matches if necessary. One, however, did the trick.

Dr. Bowen, having laid his paper on the floor and lighted all four corners, watched the bright flame leap up for a second or two, sped soundlessly back to the pantry and to the forward stairs again; and then, with a considerable clatter, raced down and straight into the billiard-room with:

"What's burning down here?"

"Hey, bo!" the chauffeur said. "Get back to your kennel up there or—"

"That be damned!" Dr. Bowen cried hotly. "Do you suppose we're going to stay up there and be cooked alive and—"

"Say! On the level, the old dump *is* on fire!" the smaller man cried, almost as one word, for he had stepped into the hallway.

"It's what?" the chauffeur snapped,

starting after him as he sped quickly to the rear.

The beer bottles were still there, half filled! One twitch sent Dr. Bowen's hand into his cash pocket. Another brought it out with several white pellets between the finger-tips! A third caused the other hand to flit over the beer bottles.

Then Dr. Bowen, giving thanks to the man who invented the "blow-up" preparation in hypodermic tablets which causes their quick solution, tore after the other two and reached the kitchen not ten feet behind them!

His little blaze was doing nobly; at first glance the flames seemed to be breaking through from the cellar. Consumed with apparent excitement, Dr. Bowen bumped into both gentlemen before they had even found the light, establishing his presence with them should calmer afterthought cause one or the other to review the happening.

And now, while the smaller man switched on the lights, the chauffeur stamped industriously at the blaze—and it was gone!

"Was that only—a paper on fire?" Dr. Bowen cried breathlessly, dabbing at his brow.

"That was—just a paper," the chauffeur answered, looking at him. "And I got a sneaking suspicion that *you*—"

"Well, I don't know the idea of all this, as you're aware," Dr. Jim said, very energetically, "and I'd about given up trying to find out when I smelled that smoke. But by gad! if my life's going to be imperiled by a couple of half-drunken thugs throwing matches around, I'll start something in here that they'll hear outside! Get that?"

The chauffeur's too intelligent gaze, puzzled though it might be, wandered from the charred fragments back to Dr. Bowen.

"You won't start anything, mister," he said. "And I got an idea you lit that up!"

"Have all the idiotic ideas you like, but stop throwing matches around!" Dr. Bowen retorted with an angry little laugh. "I've been treated to enough insanity for one night, my man. I'm not going to be roasted without making some noise, believe me!"

"Why, how could he light that up, Joe?" the smaller man asked, with what seemed reason. "He come down the front way; we could 'a' heard him if he came down back and—why would he 'a' done it?"

Dr. Jim, calm returning, turned back to the hallway.

"Mice started it, if you didn't, I suppose," he said briefly. "Look around and pick up any other papers that are lying about."

The chauffeur gazed after him for a moment and then shrugged his shoulders. Dr. Jim, without a backward glance, but with divers angry mutterings, returned slowly to the stairway, paused to look over the floor of the billiard-room, and called sharply:

"One of your cigarettes has fallen to the floor. There'll be another blaze in there in a minute. Look after it, you!"

Then he mounted the stairway, to the region of the thick carpets—and stopped.

He could hear them better from this point than anywhere else. He waited as their steps returned to the billiard-room and clattered about the hardwood floor.

He heard their mumbled discussion, as to just what had caused the queer little fire and, very shortly, grinned to himself as their limited intellects discarded the matter as immaterial and of no further interest.

The chairs scraped, and there was some discussion as to the cards which had been laid aside hastily at the alarm. Two minutes of highly profane argument and the matter was compromised by another deal; five minutes of muttering followed that, and then, after a brief silence, came the sound he had been waiting for—the thump of an empty bottle, set on the floor!

"Any more suds out there?" the chauffeur's voice inquired.

"Sure. I brought in ten bottles. There's four left."

"Chase yourself out and get another two," the chauffeur directed. "Git some of these empties out of the way, too; they're kicking all over the floor."

"Wait," said the smaller man, and in the stillness a gurgle sounded, music to the ear of James Bowen.

For now, in sweet unconsciousness, each of the pair was digesting as tidy a dose of morphin as could be given him without the risk of permanently detaching his soul from his body—nice, fresh morphin, too, the good doctor reflected cheerfully, which had come to Hallas only the week before his leaving.

And it should work rather quickly, too, he thought. The gentlemen, very likely, had been up and about all day; they looked rather tired, and they had been consuming the brew of the hop, which was also likely to coax them toward slumber.

When steps returned from somewhere at the rear, and chairs creaked again, and he caught the twin pops of opening bottles, Dr. Bowen sat down comfortably on the soft carpet. He had really nothing to do now but wait. Wits, muscle, and a little medical knowledge had furnished everything but the crowbar needed to pry out some of the window-boarding or a key to open a door to freedom.

Time wore on pleasantly enough. Perhaps even Miss Catterson had fallen asleep up there; she was soundless as the butler himself, long since succumbed to hyoscyamin. Nor were the pair below nearly so talkative these last minutes. They had taken to yawning audibly; in a disconnected, wondering way they mentioned the extreme sleepiness that had come upon them—and then, after another wait, it seemed that the smaller man had collapsed, because there was a thud and a quantity of drowsy protest in the chauffeur's tone.

Far away a big clock struck the hour of three. Dr. Bowen, eyes opening a little, risked going half-way down the flight; and he smiled happily and continued to the bottom.

The small man was comfortable on the floor; the chauffeur leaned against the wall, mouth open and eyes closed. The kindly doctor whistled as he examined the pulse of each and trotted cheerily to the basement door.

Here, at least, there was a key on the inside. He turned it and walked into a black vestibule where stood another door and another key. He opened that as well and, striking the good open air abruptly, devoted several seconds to deep breathing as he tried the lock of the iron gate. It was a sane lock, perfectly willing to open as he turned it back.

Whistling still, James Bowen mounted to the musty, dusty setting of the jewel that was Helen Catterson.

"Come, please," he said very gently, "we're going now."

CHAPTER XV.

AGAIN NIGHT WANDERERS.

THE answer to the mystery, should it ever come, must come later; the menace of three inexplicable citizens had been drugged out of existence; the path to freedom was clear. So that Dr. Bowen's attention, once more, was all for Helen Catterson and active wonder roused within him at her sudden start and the expression of the eyes that turned to him.

They were startled and incredulous, but they were not insane—again he could have sworn that much! A dim, small suspicion gathered strength and still more strength; quite unsmilingly he stepped to the girl and looked steadily at her.

It was upon the tip of his tongue to inform her that she was shamming and note the effect—but the vagueness was back again, and the monotonous voice was asking:

"Can we go now?"

"We can," said Dr. Bowen.

The girl's hand rested on his arm and she looked up at him with the old pathetic, fast-winking earnestness.

"The box—I know now, about the box!" she said.

"You know where it is?"

"Yes—here! See?"

She opened the little handbag and slipped one slender hand to the bottom. She held up for Dr. Bowen's inspection what seemed to be an ordinary house-key and smiled quite delightedly.

"I know now. I can find it. I can find the box now," she assured him.

"Let's go and find it, then," Dr. Bowen said quietly.

Without warning the smile disappeared. Sullen suspicion came suddenly into the beautiful eyes and the girl drew away from him.

"You—coming?" she muttered.

"Yes."

"Oh!" said Miss Catterson, as she walked out of the room and down the stairs.

He had been wrong, of course. The affliction was perfectly genuine, although more and more he doubted its seriousness and alleged incurability. Dr. Bowen, as the girl came to the front door, took her arm gently and led her back.

"We're going out the lower way," he murmured. "This door's locked, and—"

"Oh!" escaped Miss Catterson as the billiard-room came into sight. "They—they are dead!"

"Not a bit of it, my dear!" chuckled the doctor. "They're just taking a little well-earned rest. This way out, and we'll leave the doors open and give them some air in their bedroom. There!"

He closed the gate and smiled appreciatively at the big, black houses about and the starry sky overhead. It had been some time since he had enjoyed a good look at them and the sight was grateful.

Miss Catterson, however, was giving small attention to the beauties of the outdoors; fine head up, slim shoulders squared, she was moving directly back to Montague Street.

"You know where you're going?" Dr. Bowen inquired.

"I know, about the box. Let me alone!" said the girl.

"But—"

"Let me alone! Let me alone!" Helen repeated, harshly and irritably.

The doctor fell into wise silence. As a matter of fact, she did seem to have a pretty definite idea this time.

They had turned into Montague Street and were walking briskly back toward the Borough Hall. There, to be sure, was the hall itself, and now they were crossing to the far side of Fulton Street, with its elevated structure. They turned up-town and walked on in complete silence!

It was ground that they had covered once before that night, although the previous trip had been aboard the Flatbush Avenue car. Here were the eternal shops, black and still now—over there were the big department-stores, and unless Dr. Bowen's sense of location erred, the street over there was the same old Flatbush Avenue.

Perhaps the poor muddled mind had been nearly right before; perhaps they were going back to Prospect Park for a further hunt for Catterson's devilish box. They were not, though, if Flatbush Avenue was the only route; they were to keep straight up Fulton Street and trudge on and on and on—whither?

Dr. Bowen was beyond guessing, but it seemed to him that they were taking an infernally long walk. He glanced at the girl and found the adorable little chin set with determination; she knew where she was going! Dr. Bowen, marching onward, let his thoughts drift back to the house on the heights.

Why had she gone there? Why had she been admitted? And why had he been admitted and dined, without a question or the answering of a question?

Later on in the day, if all went well with Catterson's five hundred dollars, and his lease of life was thereby renewed, and if this walk did not land them at the other end of Long Island, Dr. Bowen was go-

ing back to that house on the heights with a policeman or two, by way of looking after his patients and collecting a few cold facts. Tricks of that kind are actionable, too, and—

"Up here! Up here!" the girl said impatiently.

"What is it?" Dr. Jim asked.

"Bedford Avenue—Bedford Avenue—Bedford Avenue!" Miss Catterson muttered, hurrying on.

They had crossed this thoroughfare, too, earlier in the night, had they not? Dr. Bowen smiled and fell into step again. It was a broad and quiet street at this hour, save for the howling joy-ride that passed just as they turned in; the little all-night lunch-room over there was the only lighted establishment in sight.

They crossed to it and passed it, keeping on up-town—passed several automobile stores, and crossed a railroad cut, out of which a train roared astonishingly to the elevated structure beyond and pounded out of sight—passed an armory, looming big and black with its towers, over there—and still kept on. There was a statue of the late U. S. Grant and a theater beyond him—and now they were following a car-line up the street that went straight ahead of them while Bedford Avenue kept on to the right—and it must be nearly four o'clock in the morning!

On the corner Miss Catterson stopped and regarded him, brows knitted.

"St.—St. Marks Avenue?" she murmured.

"This seems to be St. Marks Avenue," smiled Dr. Jim.

She nodded quickly and turned farther up-town.

"Yes—yes, I know!" she said, and struck a faster gait.

So they were back in a purely residential section, eh? These were the homes of people as prosperous as those who lived in poor Rimborne's neighborhood—and up here on the next block they seemed even more well-to-do. Here, except for an inevitable apartment or two, the houses were huge and detached; and incidentally, what tremendous blocks they were! Crossing from one to the other of them, the beginning of the next was all but out of sight; yet this was the direction ordained by Miss Catterson's mind, for she was all but running now.

And so *this* was their latest goal!

The doctor looked up at the wide, dark home, set well back, as Helen stopped abruptly. This was it, fast enough, because with a little cry of satisfaction she had opened the gate and was leading the way up the paved path.

They were on the veranda now, and before the main entrance, through which no light showed—ah, and she was getting out the key, too!

Dr. Bowen stepped forward, distinctly startled. A girl in that condition had no real business rattling a key in somebody's front door at that hour. People have a way of growing excited and shooting through doors upon occasions, and while Miss Catterson doubtless associated this home very definitely with something or other—

Here Dr. Bowen halted his stepping forward process.

The key had not only fitted the lock! The door had opened and, without a trace of hesitation, Helen Catterson had stepped directly into the gloom beyond!

CHAPTER XVI.

MAKING FREE WITH A STRANGE HOUSE.

EYES round and well-nigh thunderstruck, James Bowen merely gazed after her for a little. It was not that he felt any particular fear; but once this night the strange girl had led him into a house and he had been at some pains getting both of them out of it again.

So far as he had attempted a forecast, he had expected that Helen Catterson's journey would end at an excavation or a park, or some other spot in which a deranged person, wandering about, might conceivably hide a box. This thing of

walking straight into another private home was rather too much — and still, she had done it and he was standing outside. Then, with a last, bewildered look about the deserted neighborhood, he followed after!

She was not more than ten feet beyond the doorway. She was breathing audibly now, too, and plainly laboring under some excitement. Her light hand touched his own as she murmured:

"Close the door! We mustn't be found here."

"What?"

"Close it carefully, please," the girl's earnest voice went on. "The people—up there! They're asleep, you know."

"Is *this* your home?" Dr. Bowen demanded, while little chills ran through him for a moment. "I thought that—"

"My home? No, not my home!" Miss Catterson said, almost angrily. "Oh, close the door before some one comes and sees."

The doctor drew a long breath and obeyed—but not without a careful feeling about at the latches. There was no key at all on the inside of this latest portal of the realms of mystery; there was only a spring latch, and that could be pushed back very readily.

He found the girl's hand fumbling about for him and gripped it firmly.

"Just a moment!" he whispered. "Is this the home of your—er—relatives?"

"No."

"Then it is the house of a friend?" he asked.

"Friend? Oh, no," the girl whispered back impatiently. "These people—I don't know them, but the box! The box!"

"I know all about the box," Dr. Bowen said firmly; "but if we're in somebody's house and risking a storm of revolver bullets any minute, we—where did you get that key, child?"

The slim hand pressed his own ever so earnestly.

"Oh, won't you come?" its owner breathed. "The key? I—why, I have the key, have I not? We came in with the key? Won't you come?"

"Come where?" asked Dr. Jim through his teeth.

"To find the box!" said his charge. "I know where it is, now! I can find it! Truly, I can find it."

"It's in this house?"

"Yes, in this house!"

"You left it here yourself?"

"Of course! Won't you—"

In the blackness, Dr. Bowen shook his head.

"I guess so," he said resignedly. "Which way?"

"Down here, I think. Will you light the hall light, please?"

"Isn't that risky?" Dr. Jim inquired.

"Why, no," his unhappy charge assured him, as she pushed a button in the dark and set the high cluster of five incandescents to blazing. "Why is it risky?"

Lips tight, ears straining, muscles ready to leap aside and drag her with him, James Bowen peered into the gloom at the head of the stairs. Nobody appeared. Long seconds dragged by, and still nobody turned up, nor was there any sound of movement above.

His tension lessened and he looked about quickly.

If the house on the heights had been boarded and stuffy and mysterious, this splendid place was the very reverse! Furniture, rugs, statuary, all were costly and beautiful; the walls of the drawing-room in there were lined with paintings; and Miss Catterson, apparently, meant to examine them!

With a smile of childlike pleasure she stepped in and, without hunting for it, merely pushed another button.

"My dear young lady!" James Bowen said hoarsely and persuasively, "if the box is here, let us find it and then go to your home; but let's spare the light!"

Helen Catterson merely studied him.

"Not here," she murmured.

"Not in the house, you mean?" the doctor asked, with eagerness unconcealed.

"Oh, yes. In the house, but not here," the girl smiled; and her own lips compressed and the bewildered line grew between her brows for a moment; and then, like sunshine flashing out, the turmoil within seemed to still, and she smiled again and cried: "Oh, I know! *I know now!*"

"Not so loud!" Dr. Jim gasped. "You—"

"Come! I know! I know!" his charge whispered. "Back here!"

She was off again, with scant concern for anything save the immediate object of her hunt.

She whisked into the corridor with Dr. Bowen at her heels and made straight as an arrow for the heavily curtained door at the back. She pushed back the curtains and, before he had entered even, her wretched gift of finding switches had lighted some one's library!

In a smaller and more modern and homelike fashion the room was not so very different from another Dr. Jim had seen that night. There was a big desk on the far side, and half a dozen deep chairs, but the shining black safe in the corner was what Miss Catterson sought.

Radiant, she glided up to and touched it, looking confidently at Dr. Bowen.

"In here!" she said! "In here!"

"You left the box in there?"

"The box—yes! Oh, open it quickly, please!"

Dr. Jim Bowen advanced upon her slowly. That look was back again for an instant—that peculiarly sane look which had puzzled him before. It was gone now, but it had been there unmistakably.

Confound it! It was all gone again, and the girl was tapping impatiently with her foot as she said:

"Open it, please! We came to open it! Open the safe!"

"I'm not a safe-cracker," Dr. Bowen said mildly. "I—"

"I opened it!" the girl informed him. "I—can't remember how, but I opened it."

Her voice was rising excitedly and the foot was tapping faster. Dr. Bowen, whose own brain was beginning to feel rather odd, compromised by hunching down before the safe.

He had put in an unusual night, and done some unusual things; it was not beyond the possibilities that this combination lock would yield as readily as another had done earlier in the evening. It was most unlikely, but he essayed a twirl or two of the dial and thought rapidly and with a covert smile.

The very best thing about this latest visit was that the girl seemed wholly convinced of her own accuracy. He would be unable to open the safe, but he could lead her back to Catterson with the news that his accursed box in all likelihood was secure in somebody's house on St. Marks Avenue. And then he—

"*Hello!*" gasped Dr. Bowen, rising with a jerk.

Out in the street an automobile gear had crunched as a car stopped. Standing on tiptoe, Dr. Bowen could look down the hall and see the car itself at the curb, grotesquely outlined through the etched glass door.

And he could see more than that! He could see a man's figure bounding up the steps; he could hear the scrape of another key in the front door. Now, in fact, he could see the door opening and the man entering.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE UNPLEASANT TURN.

YOUR really first-class brain is a dependable machine. Dr. Bowen had suspected that a certain marked fogginess was coming upon his thinking apparatus, but he had erred. The brain was whizzing along like lightning now.

He himself was in plain sight, and as soon as the hasty citizen, doubtless amazed at the early morning illumination, should remove his key and raise his head, Dr. James Bowen would be in line for more trouble. But Helen Catterson,

standing aside, was not visible to the newcomer.

She was looking her mild astonishment at the doctor. The latter's sharp eye fairly pierced her.

"Slip into the dining-room there!" he whispered. "Get out of the house if you have the chance! Quick!"

Or was that the kind of order to hurl at a girl of imperfect mental balance? Perhaps not. Perhaps it would have been better and safer to keep her here and present the cold and impossible truth to the owner of the place, and then—well, the time for quiet meditation had passed, anyway!

The gentleman had raised his head and met the eyes of Dr. Bowen. He started with really melodramatic violence, throwing up his hands for an instant. Blank amazement, then, possessed him for a second or two — and next came incredulity, as the newcomer moved forward eyes ever on the excellent doctor—and finally he smiled suddenly and, it seemed, rather nastily!

Dr. Jim, however, paid little enough heed to the smile just then; his brain was taking another of the brief spins to which it was growing somewhat accustomed. This was no furious stranger—this was the lean, tall man of forty or so who had spoken to him briefly in Catterson's parlor and then hurried away.

Now, brows arched and smile more cynical, he whistled softly.

"My soul and honor!" said he. "It's *you!*"

"You're the one—" Dr. Bowen began hoarsely.

"Well, who'd have thought it? Who'd have thought that?" the tall one inquired. "And you a person of parts, a respectable pillar of—"

"*What?*" asked Dr. Jim.

Sheer amazement prevented his going further. The tall man, whoever he might turn out to be eventually, was taking his presence in here at four in the morning without anger, without the natural kind of astonishment one might have expected, without anything, indeed, but that decidedly nasty and mysterious smile.

He had perched himself on the arm of a chair now and was looking Dr. Bowen up and down with a dry grin.

"It simply shows that you never can tell," he remarked cryptically. "I saw you coming in, but it never occurred to me that it might be you. For Dalbane's sake—poor devil—I took the liberty of walking in. He left the odd key with me yesterday when he started for Boston. You didn't know *that*, did you?"

"I—don't know—" Dr. Jim stammered.

"Badly rattled, eh?" the tall stranger went on contemptuously. "Foolish, that! You adventurous Don Juan fellows ought to keep a special reserve of wits for use in emergencies like this, you know."

"*Don Juan?*" Dr. Bowen repeated dazedly.

"Don fiddlesticks, if you like that better," the stranger chuckled. "Where's the lady? Up-stairs?"

"The—the lady?" Dr. Jim essayed, and just checked the glance that would have turned toward the dark dining-room. "There is no lady and—"

"Listen, doc!" the tall man interrupted sharply. "Don't be an ass. I may be a good deal more of a friend than you fancy. Where's Mrs. Dalbane?"

"I never heard of any Mrs. Dalbane!" Dr. Bowen exploded.

And now, inexplicably, the gentleman who had been in Catterson's snapped his fingers impatiently, and, jerking away from his chair, came close to the doctor.

"What's the matter with you, you confounded fool?" he demanded. "Are you so thoroughly flabbergasted that you don't even know you're standing in Dalbane's study, at four in the morning and with the house lit up like a Christmas-tree? Shake yourself together and don't try that rot on me. I saw you come in here!"

Dr. Bowen could say nothing at all!

"I saw you coming up the next block together, just as I was going to turn into

the avenue. I didn't know that it was *you,* but I knew her instantly, of course. I pulled in and let you pass and—gad, it's pretty daring and brazen stuff, doc! Walking into another man's house with his wife at this hour, with the servants all gone and—"

"Wait!" said Dr. Jim thickly, for while there were a dozen side mysteries here beyond any present guessing, one elemental fact was boring into him and sending the color from his face.

The tall man, however, was smiling grimly at the dark window.

"See here, doctor," he went on quickly and quietly, as he turned back, "I'll tell you something else you don't know, and then I'll make you as friendly an offer as one sinner ever heard from another. Dalbane left Boston on the midnight train, and he'll be here for breakfast! Don't wheeze; there's still a margin of hours to make your getaway. Hop into my car and I'll run you out on the island and drop you at the—"

"*Wait!*" said Dr. Bowen.

"Dear me!" cried the stranger, and his eyes opened at the sight of the white face so near his own. "Are you so thoroughly infatuated that—"

"I don't know what you're talking about," Dr. Jim went on. "Either you've gone crazy or I have, but that doesn't alter the one thing I can make out of what you're saying. I came in here with a young lady who is no Mrs. Dalbane and—"

"Doc," the stranger said ever so gently, "I've known Mrs. Dalbane since she was five!"

He smiled again at Dr. Bowen, and for some seconds the physician was unable to speak. When his voice did come, however, it held the cold of a steel blade.

"Let the rest of it go," he said. "Do I understand you to hint that the young lady with whom I entered this house is not quite—er—all right?"

"Oh! Very much all right," the tall one laughed. "She's a general favorite, in fact. Doctor, you're not the first—"

The laugh had done it! Dr. Bowen's fist, the holding back of which had been literal torture this last minute, had passed beyond control. Through the quiet house the doctor's snarl must have echoed—and then his own wild little laugh, because the fist had landed fairly between the tall man's eyes and he was pitching backward over his chair!

And after that, for several minutes, Dr. Jim found his personal concerns enveloped in a bewildering haze of red! Things happened so swiftly that he could not grasp them as they came—the first of them being the rise of the tall man.

He was athletic of build, and, as became gloriously apparent, pugnacious of nature! He had made his feet again before the shock of the blow passed, but having reeled for an instant, he was coming directly at Dr. Jim, himself dazed and unreasoning, but out for blood!

Yes, and he had landed on Dr. Jim's shoulder a blow that would have finished him, had it but found the chin for which it started! His other fist was coming up now, and—so were Dr. Bowen's, because the stranger had seen fit to slur the young woman to whose cure, before this, Dr. Bowen had virtually decided to consecrate his life!

Ah, and he had collided with both the Bowen fists at once, too, for he screamed hoarsely and tottered away again—and recovered himself, too.

Other things were happening in the few dizzy seconds of that pause. It was Dr. Bowen's indefinite impression that Helen Catterson herself had sped into the room, cheeks blazing, eyes full of perfectly sane anger! He even thought he heard:

"I never bargained for anything like that! Doctor, I—"

Then, coming from nowhere in particular, a shirt-sleeved arm reached from the gloom of the dining-room and dragged her back—and the tall man was upon him once more.

It was to be close infighting this time, evidently. The stinging scrape along Dr. Bowen's jawbone drew his whole atten-

tion back to the matter in hand and convinced him of that. Face aflame and pleasantly cut already, the tall stranger was lunging at him—and the doctor from Hallas crouched abruptly and stepped back—gaged his distance very tidily, and drove with his whole heart and soul at the solar plexus!

The tall man was merely gone! That black and white streak over there might turn out later to be the tall man, but Dr. Bowen's chief concern just now was with the burly, shirt-sleeved person who loomed up in this fantastic nightmare, tearing toward him.

"Stop that, you damned fool!" he shouted, reaching mistakenly for Dr. Bowen. "This is no madhouse, whatever—"

All too plainly did his savage fist betray its intention of eliminating Dr. Jim as a conscious factor. All too obvious was the untrained blow that came toward a physician temporarily revisiting his cave-man state.

Dr. Bowen, with another crazy laugh, pounced forward at him and swung upward—and the uppercut arrived audibly and after it a thunderous crash.

Mouthing, gasping, the burly man was rolling across the floor to safety.

And here was entering still another actor—a man, as much of a stranger as any of the rest to Dr. Jim, but quite as full of strong emotion.

Indistinctly, Dr. Jim believed that a bell had been ringing and that the front door had opened. At any rate, the newest member was with them, gulping and chattering as he helped the burly one to his feet, over there by the door.

Under the white of his evening shirt his chest heaved and his face was red with rage. He was saying—why, what was he saying, anyway?

Momentarily safe from attack, Dr. Bowen steadied himself against the fateful safe and dragged his faculties back to earth.

The latest stranger was pointing at him now with a thick and trembling finger.

"Whinnys?" he was crying. "Whinnys! Why, that man doesn't look any more like Whinnys than you look like Billy Sunday! *You've had the wrong man all the time!*"

CHAPTER XVIII.

BACK TO THE B. R. T.

DR. BOWEN felt a sudden smile coming to his straining features. It should have been the calm, strong, assured smile that was so much a part of his professional self, but it was not.

This smile, as much as anything else, resembled the smile of an idiot child trying to comprehend—because, while a shaft of light had shot into Dr. Jim's brain, it was illuminating nothing really definite beyond the fact that they had thought him Polly Whinnys. And then even the smile was gone as the memory of what had roused him returned with a rush!

That lean black and white shape over there, just beginning to stir again, had dared to intimate that Helen Catterson, whatever he might call her—

"What d'ye mean? What are you talking about, Tyne?" boomed from the burly man.

"Just what I say!" the stranger shouted at him. "That's no more Whinnys than—good Heaven! Is that Harrison?" he choked suddenly, as the black and white victim fell under his eye for the first time.

"Of course it's Harrison! He—"

"Is he dead?" gasped the latest mystery.

The burly man—and from the fact that he wore slippers and was in his shirt-sleeves Dr. Bowen deduced that he was the actual tenant of the house—dropped on his knees with a dumfounded groan.

"What? I guess not! Good Lord, I hope not!" he cried, shaking the lean one. "No, of course he isn't dead! He—gimme a glass of water, Tyne. There's a glass on the side of the basin there. Hurry!"

The red-faced arrival, breathing hard, lumbered over, kicked aside the screen, and finally located the glass as he asked:

"What happened to him, Fenner? What's the matter with him?"

"He—"

"Was that a genuine fight going on here when I came in?" the red-faced man puffed as he returned with the water.

He of the shirt-sleeves laughed somewhat wildly.

"It was, and that's what happened to him," said he. "He tried to put some sort of lunatic finishing touch on it—I don't know what. He wanted to take him in his car, you know, and get him out of town—"

"But he didn't have Whinnys at all! That's not Whinnys!"

"Who is it, then?" the shirt-sleeved man began, as he bathed the brow of the evident Mr. Harrison. "Why, Tyne, it—aha! He's coming around now."

One on either side of him, they poured further water on Mr. Harrison, mumbling over him and talking to him in a disconnected and terrified way that might have been mildly funny under other circumstances.

Dr. Bowen, still heated enough to be honestly disappointed that he had failed to slaughter Mr. Harrison, gave little attention to them. Over there in the doorway of the dining-room, Helen Catterson was standing—more beautiful than ever with the snapping eyes and the high flush, winking rapidly but in an entirely different fashion, for this time she was winking back tears of real anger.

Dr. Bowen, unheeded by the distressed gentlemen over their suffering friend, crossed to the doorway, for she was beckoning to him. As he came to her she spoke in a quick whisper:

"Tell me, please—you're *not* Dr. Whinnys?"

"Certainly not."

"Then who—who are you?"

"Dr. Bowen, as it happens," smiled that gentleman, and for a little all the rest of the muddle ceased to be and she alone was there. "Miss Catterson, this is all beyond me just now, but—"

"I'm not Miss Catterson—there is no Miss Catterson. His name isn't even Catterson, I believe!" said the astonishing young woman. "And I'm not Mrs. Dalbane—or whatever he called her. I never knew that anything—anything of that kind was contemplated! You do believe that, don't you?" she asked, miserably.

"And your mind is not at all affected, is it?" Dr. Bowen muttered. "I've been suspecting that for some time."

"It isn't and it never has been, except that I must have been born a fool!" the girl said bitterly. "And if you're not Dr. Whinnys, the trouble I've made for you—oh!"

Dr. James Bowen found that he had taken firm hold of the two slim hands clenched so distressedly before him.

"My child," said he, "the joy of being near you for one evening is such utter compensation for any trouble you could make that—"

Her eyes, after one swift upward glance of wholly warranted astonishment, went past him. Abruptly, the hands closed warningly over one of Dr. Bowen's, and she nodded toward the room; and Dr. Bowen, stepping down from his cloud, perceived that Harrison was sitting up. He was able to talk, too, as they lifted him to the chair beside the desk.

"What? Whinnys? I don't care a damn who he is, Tyne! The lout nearly killed me, and I'll jail him for it as sure—"

"Hush!" the red-faced man cautioned, while he of the shirt-sleeves sent his hands through his thick hair and seemed to be fighting off a little impending insanity of his own.

"I'll do no hushing!" snarled Dr. Jim's victim. "I'll get back at him if I have to spend ten thousand dollars, I tell you!"

"But that's—that's ridiculous!" the apparent master of the house protested. "You can't do that without making public—"

"It's not my pot of beans that'll be spilled!" Harrison said savagely. "I was

only in it for the joke of the thing and—ah!"

He snatched down the telephone-receiver. The red-faced Mr. Tyne, also making a brave struggle for composure, gripped his wrist and put a finger on the hook, holding it down. Also, he glanced over his shoulder at Dr. Bowen, and the latter barely caught:

"Wait a minute! If he isn't Whinnys, Heaven knows who he is, Fenner! If we can lock him up in a station-house, he'll be that much readier to keep his mouth shut as the price of having the charge withdrawn—eh?"

"If it comes to that," Mr. Fenner said suddenly, "he was working over my safe and I saw him at it, but—"

Harrison, with a wrench, threw off Mr. Tyne's hands and slammed the telephone to the desk again.

"You do what you like; I'm going to have him pinched on my own account, and the charge will not be withdrawn, at that! Hello! Give me Police Headquarters!"

The man from Hallas, just as he would have stepped forward to speak his mind, grew rigid. These three knew exactly what was afoot and could shape any kind of story accordingly, while he could offer only a recital such as no well-balanced magistrate in the world could or would believe!

These three were men of wealth, if appearances counted; he had one dollar and eighty-five cents. Dr. Bowen looked about wildly. Even the girl was gone!

But she was back in an instant, behind him and whispering directly into his ear:

"I've opened the front door—wide! Run!"

"I—"

"Oh, please go while you can, doctor!" the whisper urged frantically. "They may turn any second and—"

"I won't leave you here!" Dr. James Bowen said doggedly, albeit with a little smile. "I undertook—"

"Doctor, I'm absolutely safe, I tell you! Won't you please try to get out. I don't think they'll let Harrison follow you, but he's the most vindictive—oh, *please* go!"

"Give me the Atlantic Avenue station, Headquarters!" Harrison barked into the telephone.

Hands on their hips, Tyne and Fenner were looking down at him, and the former nodded.

"Let him do it, Fenner!" he said. "It won't kick up much excitement, and I've got a darned good scheme forming right now!"

The frenzied squeeze on his right hand roused Dr. Bowen's numbing faculties. He looked around and found eyes of agony imploring him.

Lovelier than any woman he had ever seen before, he might never see her again; but she knew all about this wild business where he knew nothing at all. One last glance toward the substantial citizens whose backs were still toward him—and Dr. Bowen, on tiptoe, leaped through the dining-room, into the corridor, through the door, and down to the street!

Whatever the answer might be, those eyes had finished the job. The girl might be exaggerating matters, but those eyes had told so strongly of his necessity for headlong flight that the memory of them fairly chilled him as he raced down the still street.

His very first concern was to leave the neighborhood. And then? Well, then, perhaps he could do a little thinking; then, very likely, he would calm sufficiently to see the sane course of action for a man in his predicament.

But for the present, the one amazing night of his whole humdrum existence had all but battered the senses out of him and—how many streets had he crossed already, anyway?

He seemed to remember a dozen or so, but there could not have been more than one or two. Passing lights told of a trolley line at the end of this block, and his heart rose a little. That was the next step of his flight—and of a good many other fugitives' flight, for that matter.

Oft-read accounts of the criminal who "leaped on a passing trolley-car and escaped" whizzed through his brain. Panting, Dr. Bowen pulled up with a jerk; if any one had ever made a running record for that long block he had broken it—and here was his car!

Jogging along just as if Brooklyn had held never a mystery this night, the car permitted him to gaze at its illuminated "Nostrand Avenue" for a moment, rumbled past and slowed down and then rumbled on again as he swung aboard.

A dread suspicion stabbed Dr. Bowen; this conductor would observe that he was fleeing from something. He proffered his dime and looked away. The conductor, who was singing for his own entertainment, returned a nickel without so much as a glance at him and sang on—and Dr. Jim relaxed.

Where was he going now? He wouldn't ask just yet, until his breath returned fully and he managed to mop some of the perspiration from his forehead. Or was it the part of wisdom to remain on this car at all?

Mr. Harrison, finding him absent, undoubtedly would turn in a general alarm for his capture, although he had not thought of that until this very minute! The police, seeking the natural avenues of escape, might well look on this car and others that had passed about the same time.

And an excellent way of masking a trail is by doubling. Dr. Bowen, although he had ridden no more than four or five blocks for his nickel, swung to the ground and crossed the street, rather breathless still. Another car was coming in the opposite direction. He leaped forward at the risk of his neck and boarded it without mishap.

So that now, with a dollar and eighty cents, he was headed somewhere else! Dr. Jim, nerves tingling again at the hideous smallness of the amount, felt for his precious wallet—and felt again and then again—and finally remembered the wrench he had given that side of his coat in felling Harrison and the soft thud that followed!

Wallet and dollar together were gone! They were gone, and he owned just eighty cents in the world!

"Fare!" said the conductor.

James Bowen's icy, trembling fingers managed to clutch his half-dollar, which came first to them. He proffered it and felt for his handkerchief again, for new beads of perspiration were rising on his brow—cold ones this time, an absent dollar's worth of them!

"Hey!" said the conductor.

"What?" choked Dr. Jim.

"Nothing doing on this half, mister," said the conductor. "It's bad!"

CHAPTER XIX.

FUGITIVE.

HE was a tall, keen-eyed young fellow, this B. R. T. conductor. There was something inexorable and accusing about him, out there on the platform, as he poked the offending coin at its owner and looked him straight in the eye.

"Bad?" gurgled deep in Dr. Bowen's throat.

"It was good some time; it's too much wore now, mister."

"But I took that half-dollar from one of your conductors!" Dr. Jim said desperately.

"I can't help that, boss. They won't let me turn in a smooth coin like that. If I was to take this from you, I'd have to make it up out of my own pocket when I turned in my money."

Nor did his sharp eye ever waver. Nervously and without much reason, it occurred to Dr. Bowen that an argument might possibly wind up with the calling of a policeman; that sort of thing did happen quite frequently with cab-drivers and the like!

Mouth open, he drew a quantity of reviving oxygen down through his throat—and accepted the coin. Mouth closed again and lips tight with real mental

stress, he dropped it into his pocket and found his nickel.

"Sorry, boss, but I couldn't take a chance like that, you know," the conductor concluded languidly. "Us fellers have trouble enough the way it is. Transfer?"

"I guess so," mumbled Dr. Jim, accepting the slip and entering the car, with the step of an old man!

He was likely to be less conspicuous, sitting in there in the corner, affecting to drowse after the manner of the three or four other passengers—and that was going to count for a good deal now.

A number of years had passed, you see, since Dr. Jim's last intimate contact with the affairs of a big city; his conception of Greater New York's modern police methods came largely from the feature articles he had read with such avidity, up there in Hallas. He knew full well that, from Coney Island to the other end of the Bronx, the old clumsy order had vanished, giving place to new police efficiency.

Nowadays, he believed, thanks to telephone systems and the like, each member of the ten thousand patrolmen could be put in quick touch with the other nine thousand, nine hundred and ninety-nine. There was a real detective bureau, too, to spread its net over any given section or over all sections, at an instant's warning.

And before this, he verily believed, Harrison's summons to the constabulary had started the net to spreading over such portions of Brooklyn as might be expected to yield the misguided physician who had given Harrison the greatest bruising of his life!

As to what the end of it might be, if they actually did arrest him, Dr. Bowen declined to speculate. Nothing, allegedly, can happen to the innocent man, but at the same time so many things do happen to a man whose capital is limited to one twenty-five-cent piece that—Dr. Jim, with a grunt of genuine exertion, forced the police aspect of the matter from his mind and tried to think of other things.

This, for one of them, was the net result of his new policy of push and unscrupulous diving after the money that had been denied him all through his professional career! Had he but used a little less of the new policy, he would have informed Catterson—or whatever the elderly one's name might be—that Dr. Whinnys was not at home and that the man answering the telephone was a mere impoverished medical stranger. That, so far as he could guess from the girl's hurried words, would have ended the whole affair before it ever started.

And yet, had he done so, he would never have met that particular girl! Dr. Bowen, with a mighty sigh, felt the bitterest smile creeping to his lips.

What a girl it was! And who and what was she? She was sweet and good as she looked—so much he knew and no more.

She had feigned insanity to serve somebody's end, and then had repented; and if his data concerning the young woman ended there, his thoughts did not.

Not, assuredly, that Dr. James Bowen was absurd enough to think himself in love with a girl he had not known ten hours ago and had known since then only under the most unusual conditions. But just the same, the lovely face danced before him as he sat, head bowed, in the car, as no other face had ever taken the liberty of dancing!

This, though, was no time for mooning, was it? Dr. James Bowen, with another profound sigh, turned back to his personal affairs.

He was headed—where? Anywhere the car happened to be going, so long as the police kept off it. At the end of the line, very likely, he could transfer to some other; but if it came to a point of breaking his last quarter for further riding—Dr. Bowen winced visibly.

He might be tired and distraught with all that had happened since rushing up to Rimborne's house, but if he wished to travel further he would have to walk. Once, as he boarded this car, he had had a

half-formed plan of getting to New Jersey first of all and then telephoning back, probably to Dr. Whinnys for a beginning. Even that was done for now.

And what—*what* had it all been about? What had Harrison meant when he said that he was in it for the joke of the thing and implied that the others were involved, for reasons far from playful?

What had been the answer to all that happened in the house on the heights? Why had he been lured to the St. Marks Avenue home, evidently Fenner's? What was Polly Whinnys's connection with the insane business, and what—just here Dr. Jim forgot the recent past and returned to the immediate minute with a distressing jar.

For, coming out of the black, early morning, a policeman had boarded the car and now, standing on the platform, he was looking at Dr. Bowen!

The practitioner from Hallas, glancing up for a startled second or so, found the penetrating official eyes directly upon him and glanced away again as quickly. Without ever having seen it before, he knew the significance of that penetrating stare quite well!

His description had gone out to the police by telephone by now; this man, with his brass buttons and his shining shield, had caught sight of him from the street and stepped aboard for a closer inspection.

He was making it now and—or, no, he wasn't watching so keenly now, but that failed to fool James Bowen, M.D. The officer, in fact, was looking away from him and into the night with a studied indifference even more ghastly than his stare.

He had his man! There was no need of rushing in and grabbing him. He was waiting, doubtless, until the car came nearer to the next police station, and then he would tap Dr. Bowen and request his company to a cell.

And he and his good quarter and his bad half-dollar would be locked up together, and later in the day three rich men, for reasons of their own, would try railroading him to the penitentiary and—automatically, without thought because he dared not think, Dr. Jim rose and stepped to the platform.

Automatically, he dropped from the car to the street, staggered and spun around but still kept his feet, and reached the dark sidewalk!

Again, he was somewhere in the suburbs! At the other end of the block the car was bowling along swiftly, but conductor and policeman were gazing back at him; the latter, indeed, was shading his eyes and peering over the side of the platform. And as the car stopped they conferred, and it seemed to Dr. Jim, just as he turned the corner into a blacker street than this one, that the policeman was on the point of following him.

Dr. Bowen, innocent of everything but a nervous system rasped to a saw-tooth edge, swallowed a convulsive gasp and ran!

He raced no more than twenty yards, however! He pulled himself back to a walk so suddenly that the slide of his feet echoed through the suburban solitude—because there was another police uniform just ahead of him. And what was more terrible, while he had fancied this latest officer to be going in the other direction, he was doing nothing of the kind! He was strolling straight for Dr. James Bowen!

Very likely he needs no apology at all; Dr. Jim, as a rule, was the calmest mortal in the world—but he was almost anything else this morning. He did neither more nor less than lose his head completely!

He shot one last look toward the policeman and stepped into the presumably impenetrable gloom of somebody's dry lawn; he crouched and raced directly across it, did Dr. Jim—and coming to the low fence at the far end, he laid a hand on the topmost iron rail and vaulted over, quickly and quietly, to the dry lawn of another unknown suburbanite.

And, according to his reasoning of the moment, he had made no mistake! The

officer was after him full tilt. He caught the faint glint of the shield in the light from a far-away street-lamp as the officer crossed the first lawn; he himself, failing to breathe, dodged to the shadow of the big house and, keeping close to the wall, sped on.

Very dimly, he discerned the steps just ahead, leading to the vestibule of some one's back door. Soundlessly, Dr. Bowen laughed as he dashed the drops from his eyes. There was a chance, if he could get in there until the officer passed—yes, and he could get in there, because he was in there now!

The door, whether locked or otherwise, had opened under his frantic fingers, and Dr. Jim was standing in the little enclosure, feeling about.

Outside, the officer had stopped!

Over this way there was another knob. Dr. Bowen, fingers closing over it, found that its door was locked—and yet it rattled loosely under his touch.

He came very close to it, and, winding both hands about the knob, lifted and tugged. The door, bolt slipping past the nosing in the dried-out jamb, opened, and he was in somebody's kitchen.

And now, could he but stand here until the officer had finished his brief inspection out there and convinced himself that the fugitive had gone farther, there was at least a chance of dashing away again in the direction from which he had come. Dr. Jim, teeth bared in the most remarkable smile, held his breath and clenched his hands until the nails went into the palms.

The steps out there, almost inaudible, were moving gloriously farther off! Although now, hideously, they were moving back again—and *now* they were upon the wooden flight itself!

Dr. Jim Bowen, entirely irresponsible, backed away, panting. If there was one chance in ten thousand of finding a front entrance and leaving by it, he would take the chance! He turned, poised on tiptoe.

And having turned, he came down hard on his heels once more, because lights had blazed out in the kitchen, and the muzzle of an automatic pistol was being poked directly into his white, wet face!

CHAPTER XX.

THE WHY OF IT.

BLINDED for the moment by the light, Dr. Bowen's eyes closed tight as his hands went into the air. In considerably less than one second, he realized that this time he had finished the night's unearthly work; *this* time he was done for!

Friendless, penniless, and all the rest, he might still have had some small chance of escape from the moneyed trio, even though one of them had hinted at charging him with attempted safe-cracking; but with a burglary charge to top it and that backed by the evidence of the policeman just entering behind and the armed householder just before—

"Jimmy!" boomed into his maltreated brain. "*Jimmy!*"

It sounded like the voice of a friend! An instant Dr. Bowen fancied that he had been shot and that this was one of the lightning delusions of the dying—but his eyes opened then as he caught:

"Why, Jimmy Bowen! You pie-eyed old scout, what in—"

"Why, Polly!" Dr. Jim said faintly, for the fat, smooth-shaven, red-cheeked, simple countenance above the velvet smoking-jacket was the Polly Whinnys of college days. "Polly, I—you—"

"Say, what's the matter with you?" Polly Whinnys asked, with deep concern, as he laid his pistol on the kitchen table and gripped his old friend. "You—the old midnight oil trust!—you aren't hitting the booze, are you, Jim? Why didn't you come around to the front door and ring?"

The policeman was at their side and without a smile.

"Excuse me, doctor," he said, "but—maybe you've got the wrong number on this party. He ducked in here to get away from me!"

Dr. Whinnys stared at him angrily, quite in the old, simple way.

"Why should he want to get away from you?"

"That's what I was trying to find out when he went through your back door, doctor. He started to run at the sight of me and he went over two lawns—"

"Oh, lift your lid, officer—lift your lid!" the unaltered Poldhane said disgustedly. "You're boiling over! Why, this gentleman's one of the oldest friends I've got! I suppose he didn't want to wake the house by ringing at this hour and thought he'd come in this way. What, Jim?"

Mentally, James Bowen had surrendered to inscrutable fate. Forces beyond his understanding were making sport of him to-night; out of one hundred thousand dwellings or thereabouts, he had dived into the dark and selected Polly Whinnys home again. But the fact that, for a little time, he was safe, that Polly was the same friendly, helpful soul, did not at all pass his understanding, and in the most frigidly impressive way Dr. Bowen contrived to face the officer as he said:

"Dr. Whinnys has said it all, I think. I had no—er—idea of kicking up an excitement, you know."

Slowly, the policeman looked him over, taking in every detail of him. Dr. Bowen barely concealed the shudder. The policeman nodded briefly to Polly Whinnys.

"All right, doctor; you'll have to—excuse he," he said. "Only it looked funny, the way he ducked through Paisley's place and yours at this time of the morning."

The old, boisterous laugh boomed through the kitchen.

"I guess you're a good and faithful cop, anyway, even if you are crazy," said its owner. "Have a cigar—here! No, take the bunch of them. Don't stick 'em in your hat and smash 'em, either; those are real ones!"

And now the officer had gone and Dr. Whinnys, turning the key this time on his outer door, was returning to his old-time friend.

"Why, Jimmy," said he, "you're a sight! Were you running?"

"I—yes."

"Well, I'm glad you had sense enough to come back here, anyway, no matter what time it was," Polly rambled on, slipping an arm through Dr. Jim's and leading him to the stairs and up them to the beautiful, brightly lighted office. "You know, I haven't been home more than half an hour myself. I found the girl's memo when I came in, and I could have kicked myself for not being here, old man. You didn't leave any address, and I was just wondering how I could catch you. What was that Catterson call? I never heard of him."

"That—call—" Dr. Jim began, with real difficulty.

"To the dickens with it, anyway!" Polly hurtled on. "I don't need him for a patient, whoever he is. I'm going to quit the game."

"Quit medicine?" Dr. Bowen cried.

"Chuck it as quick as a monkey chucks a red-hot penny! Say, listen, Jim! You're staying here with me as long as you're in town. I'll send my darky after your stuff so that it will be here when you get up, wherever it is now—do him good to work, Jim. Yeppy! A month from now there 'll be no more Old Doc Whinnys in Flatbush."

"But—it looks as if you had a good practise, Polly?" Dr. Jim said weakly.

"Good? It's elegant!" Dr. Whinnys informed him, with his wide and artless smile. "I tuck away eight or nine thousand dollars a year down here, after all expenses are paid, and if I knew as much about medicine as you do, I'd bunk 'em for another five thousand and hire a helper."

Dr. Jim leaned back in his chair and sighed wonderingly. He was the same old Polly—without a grain of selfishness, yet tremendously, vitally interested in everything that concerned himself and the immediate moment.

He had cocked his patent-leather feet on the desk now and lighted a cigar after pushing the box toward Dr. Bowen, and he radiated happiness, contentment, pros-

perity! He summed it all unconsciously in:

"Jimmy, I was born lucky!"

"I know you were," said Dr. Jim.

"I was born lucky, boy, but this night —*this night!*" cried Dr. Whinnys; and then, with a swirl, the feet came down and his glowing blue eyes fastened on Dr. Jim. "Say! d'ye know what I've done to-night, kid?"

"No."

"I've made a million dollars!" Dr. Whinnys announced.

"You did what?"

"On the level, Jim!" said Poldhane Whinnys, and some awe came into the eyes. "I had better than a hundred thousand laid away—some of it came in little stock fliers and some was earned honestly, but I had it! And I spent it to-night—and I've made a million dollars, just as sure as the sun's going to rise in another hour!"

"But—"

"Listen!" commanded Dr. Bowen's friend. "Last summer, I took the whole family and shipped the big car to Portland—Oregon, of course—and from there we jogged on down the coast for a couple of months. The madam—you didn't meet her, did you? She's the greatest girl that ever walked, believe me!—the madam wanted to put in some time with her sister in San Francisco; and her brother-in-law wanted to look at some land he'd bought during a brain-storm, so we started off together through Nevada. Well, the land was on the bum, Jim, but I—little me, all alone!—I fell head over heels over the greatest little vest-pocket silver mine in the world!"

Quite in the old way, his enthusiastic flush was rising and fading as he talked.

"Well, this mine, Jimmy, belonged to an eccentric old customer by name of Throckton, and he'd been sitting on it for twenty years, wondering whether to sell it or raise more money and work it properly. He wasn't ready to sell it then; he thought maybe he'd be willing to take a hundred thousand flat for it when he came East, about this time. He's got a daughter, a senior in college up-State, and he comes on with her each year.

"Well, boy, I talked it over with Throckton, and that was the best I could get out of him. He's a human schedule, Throckton; he can tell you where he was on Thursday, June 10, forty years ago—and he can tell you where he'll be at five in the afternoon next Easter. The upshot of the thing was that he said he'd be over in the Hotel Astor at nine o'clock to-night, and he wouldn't sell the mine to anybody before, but that if I walked in and handed him the cash then, most likely he'd decide to sell. We shook hands on it—that was all."

Dr. Whinnys, oozing joy, blew a long cloud of smoke at the ceiling.

"So I walked in at ten minutes of nine and sat in the lobby, and on the stroke of the hour in walked Throckton, Jim—two guys with him trying to pay more money for the same thing. One of 'em, named Tyne—"

"What?" burst from Dr. Bowen.

"One of 'em named Tyne—am I going too fast for you?—was out there last summer about the time I made the dicker, and he was on hand to-night waving the whole United States Treasury in front of the old man and trying to buy the claim. It seems that he and a bloated bondholder named Fenner, who lives up-town somewhere, pooled their spare change with still another potential criminal whose name I don't know, but who lived down on the heights before he started for a tour of South America, and they figured on snatching the thing away from me.

"Why, they even lured the old man away from me for a few minutes, and it was nearly one before I found him again. But it was all right, Jim; the old man's word is a government bond. He let 'em talk and then he came back and sold to me, with never a smile or a sigh."

"Polly—" Dr. Bowen began.

"Say, you never saw anything so funny as that man Tyne's face when he saw me!" Dr. Whinnys bubbled on. "He

must have thought I was dead, Jim. He looked at me about three times a second while we were in the same room and—say, excuse me, old man!" Polly said, suddenly contrite. "Are you trying to say something?"

"You bet I'm trying to say something!" Dr. Bowen cried. "Listen!"

In the corner of the Whinnys corridor, the cathedral chimes announced the hour of six. The maid who had admitted Dr. Bowen yesterday, and an ampler lady with her, tiptoed past the office door and down-stairs; and below a tea-kettle rattled on a stove and there was the whiring sound of a coffee mill.

And Dr. Jim, who had told his story from end to end, was still out of the law's clutches. Tired, somewhat hoarse, he lolled deep in his chair, sore and ashamed that the recital must have included his own utter failure in life.

Polly Whinnys, peculiar soul, seemed to think none the less of him. His gaze, quite full of sympathy and astonishment, remained upon Dr. Jim when at last he reached the end of his tale.

"Well, what—what do you think of 'em, for a bunch of crazy crooks!" Dr. Whinnys said, for the fortieth time.

But it was an absent-minded observation now. Dr. Whinnys's best attention was on the personal problem of Dr. Jim Bowen.

"What gets me, Jimmy," he pursued, "is why a smart chap like you ever had to try the hick doctor business! That's where you slipped, Jim. You knew more about medicine when you were half through college than I do now—but no man can make money in a place where there's no money to be made."

"Perhaps I wasn't thinking so much of money in those days," Dr. Bowen sighed. "The idea of service—"

"Yes, the idea of service is good," Polly said vaguely, "but you can't pay bills with it. Well, you're out of it now, anyway, thank Heaven. You're all right now."

"All right?"

"Why, of course you're all right," Poldhane Whinnys grinned suddenly and steadily at his friend. "I'm going to give you my practise here!"

"*Hey?*" gasped Dr. Jim, and sheer astonishment jerked the tired frame from its chair.

Dr. Whinnys also rose abruptly.

"Now listen, before you begin throwing the 'I can't accept it' stuff!" he said sternly. "That's all blamed nonsense, anyway, but even if it wasn't, from what you've been telling me, you've earned me a good million dollars to-night, Jim. One expert said she might turn out better than two millions, at that!

"From what you've said, if the lunatics had ever caught me, I'd have fallen for the mystery and the pretty girl part, and taken a chance on getting over to Manhattan in time—and Tyne would have bought the claim! Oh, no! We're going to live in San Francisco, you know, Jimmy. The lady wants to be near her sister and I'll want to be near the mine. Your job—and you've earned every right in the world to it!—is right in this house, giving my patients some real sensible dope when they holler for help!"

Dr. James Bowen swallowed twice at the thing in his throat.

"Why, Polly!" he said thickly. "If—if I could swing the thing—"

"Well, you don't suppose I'm going to leave you flat, without any money to start on, do you?" Dr. Whinnys demanded harshly. "We'll fix that, and you can hang me up for a year's rent if you like. You won't, by the way, because when my folks realize they've got a real doctor at last, you'll put in twenty hours a day around here, and curse this night for killing you with overwork.

"Now, see here! We'll have to begin the work of introducing you to a few of them to-day, after we've slept a couple of hours, because I have a million and one things to do before I leave for good. And right now, before anything else, I want to give you a skeleton idea of what—say,

you dry up for fifteen minutes and I'll show you what I want to show you."

Grinning, he spun his chair around and reached into the open safe beside his desk, dragging out several big books that looked like ledgers. Grinning, he slapped them to the desk and began to whistle as he turned pages with his left hand and jotted down an item here and there with his right, on a prescription-pad. So that Dr. James Bowen, for the time, was left to his own thoughts.

Surely, they were astoundingly different thoughts from the kind he had been enduring an hour or two ago! Through no fault of his own, he had leaped from the verge of ruin and disaster—not downward, but up to the heights of prosperity. This practise of Polly's was a gold mine in itself; and once settled in it and able to specialize as well, there was most surely no real limit to the altitude he might reach!

Or was it through no fault of his own?

It struck Dr. Bowen, after a little, that perhaps his new policy of pushing and grabbing had had something to do with the matter; in fact, they seemed to have served so nicely thus far that he would cling to the policy in a somewhat modified form in future. Or he might go even farther back than the policy itself: he might thank the B. R. T. for most of his good fortune!

It was a funny notion, causing him to smile, but it held a great deal of justice. Had the B. R. T. not been running cars in this direction, he would never have reached Polly Whinnys's neighborhood. Again, had his particular Ocean Avenue car not chosen to stop just where it had stopped, he would not even have known that Polly was settled in Brooklyn—he would not have entered the office—he would not have answered Catterson's call and stepped into the craziest night of his existence!

Actually, it was thanks to the B. R. T. that he had passed from a penniless wreck to a prosperous doctor.

And to the same B. R. T., however indirectly, he might give thanks for meeting the one girl in the world!

Curious enough was it at such a time, with his whole life altered and Polly Whinnys preparing to stagger him with details of the business, that Dr. Jim should have forgotten all else and centered his mind on the elusive vision of that lovely face!

He would find her again now, whoever or wherever she might be—yes, if he had to neglect half of Polly's wealthy patients until the hunt was over, he would still find that girl! He would know her better and, what was considerably more to the point, she should know him better.

And if, in the due course of time, Dr. Jim Bowen did not make that one particular girl his wife—the telephone was ringing.

"Hello! Hello! What? Yes, Dr. Whinnys speaking!" that gentleman said impatiently. "What? Dr. Bowen? Yes, of course I know him. He's sitting here now. Hey? Of course you can speak to him. Here, Jimmy," said Dr. Whinnys, thrusting the telephone at his friend and turning another page. "One of your lady friends that couldn't sleep, I guess. Now, lemme see—"

"Hello!" Dr. Bowen said hoarsely, because his heart—without a reason in the world!—had begun to pound.

"Dr. Bowen?" asked a voice he knew upon the instant.

"This is Dr. Bowen."

"This is—"

"Yes, I know your voice! I knew it at once!" the adventurer cried.

"Really?" the girl's tone softened and a queer little laugh rippled through it. "Doctor, I'm so glad that I caught you. I—I want to tell you how sorry I am about it all."

"Sorry?"

"You don't understand, of course," the girl went on. "I'm a private investigator—or I have been. I'm not any longer. I've given it up and I'm going home to Rochester to-day or to-morrow. I've been doing some law work for several weeks for

my cousin, who owns the agency, but I—I wanted to try something with an adventure in it and—he let me try this," the voice pursued bitterly.

"Go on," Dr. Bowen said thickly.

"They said—or Will said—that it was all in the nature of a joke. They told me that Dr. Whinnys—I've never seen him, you know—was a good deal of—well, of a fool, I'm afraid, and that he was full of romance and mystery, and that he'd be sure to stick to me because—because—"

"Because you were so very lovely?" Dr. Bowen said.

"I'm so ashamed," the voice answered faintly. "I—didn't realize, honestly. You see, it was all planned for the purpose of keeping Dr. Whinnys away from Manhattan last night; there was an appointment of some kind."

"I know about that!"

"He has told you? But he can't have told you about their wretched plot, Dr. Bowen. The men down in that heights house were operatives, too, you know, and the house belonged to one of the men who wanted to keep Dr. Whinnys from the city. That Mr. Harrison had the keys and—oh, they persuaded him not to have an alarm sent out for you, by the way!—Mr. Harrison had the keys and he laid out all the details of the scheme to keep you busy with adventure. We were to go up to Mr. Fenner's house if by any chance you succeeded in getting out down there and—and we did and—"

Dr. Bowen laughed so boisterously, so suddenly, that Dr. Whinnys, distinctly startled, looked up from his books.

"If you're distressing yourself about it—*don't!*" said Dr. Jim. "You've done me as good a turn as one mortal could do another."

The girl, apparently, did not understand.

"I—I wanted to call you up and tell you how sorry I am," she went on faintly. "Perhaps, if it had been Dr. Whinnys and he had been all they said he was, it would have been different, but—but when you thrashed those two men on the Parkway, and later, when you were so gentle with me and so wonderful in getting out of the house, and—and so different—I wanted to tell you that I've given up the business, and I'm going back to dad's law office in Rochester to-morrow."

Dr. Bowen breathed deeply. His policy of push and punch, it seemed to him, could well be applied just here.

There was no sense at all in that girl returning to a remote spot like Rochester. Dr. Jim, therefore, covered the telephone transmitter with his hand and, in the most assured fashion, barked at Polly Whinnys:

"Say, will you lend me fifty dollars in cash on account?"

"Surest thing you know," Polly said serenely. "Page two hundred and one—"

"Hello!" cried Dr. Bowen.

"Yes?" the girl said.

"Where are you now?"

"Down at the Clarendon Hotel, doctor. My sister-in-law is staying here, and I came to her from Fenner's house, after we'd thrashed it all out."

"Well, I—I have to attend a funeral this afternoon," Dr. Bowen said, sobering briefly. "But after that—well, I may as well be quite honest with you and tell you that I haven't an idea of letting you slip away without so much as another sight of you. If you'd let me call for you about half past five and then let me take you somewhere across the river for dinner and then to a show—or will you let me come at five, so that we can get acquainted?"

"Well, doctor—"

"Well, *will* you?" cried Dr. Bowen.

"Well—yes!" said the girl, and the laugh rippled through her tone again.

"Then I'll be there when the clock strikes five!" the physician almost shouted. "Good-by and—say! Wait a minute!" he cried.

"Yes?"

"Well—er—er—" Dr. Bowen said to the young woman he fully intended to marry. "Er—*what's your name?*"

THE END.

When New York Rocked

by Keene Thompson

UNTIL he drank that cup of coffee Caywood didn't know that he was going to become a thief. He hadn't known what he was going to do.

Walking the almost wholly deserted streets of Manhattan's lower end at that midnight hour, he had been convinced by a repeated search of his pockets that he hadn't a cent to his name. He had explored his clothes once more with painstaking thoroughness. In the change-pocket of his coat he had found a hole, groped through it to the bottom of the lining—and brought up two pennies.

Five minutes later he was laying those coppers down on the spattered oilcloth that covered the counter of a Water Street quick-lunch room.

The handleless, inch-thick cup which was set before him held a decoction whose only merit, aside from its cheapness, was that it was hot. It would stimulate him for a brief while, at least.

He gulped it down with famished eagerness, regardless alike of how it scalded his throat and of whether the keeper of the lunch-room and the one other patron besides himself who chanced to be in it were watching him.

The latter was doing so intently by the flickering light of the two kerosene "torches" that dimly illuminated the place at front and rear.

One of the city's human derelicts in appearance, he had flashed a hopeful glance at Caywood when the latter had entered the establishment. That look had died out of his eyes, to be replaced by a thoughtful, a speculative expression as he continued to contemplate the young man from under half-closed lids.

When Caywood left the "beanery," this individual with a look of a tramp followed him forth into the night and across the street into Battery Park. Leaning his arms on one of the stone posts of the sea-wall, Caywood gazed down into the murky depths below. He had come to the end of his string, he told himself.

That half-pint of rank fluid, which was the only thing that had passed his lips in eighteen hours, enabled him to think, as his mind had been too numbed by the direness of his plight to do before.

He, William Caywood, second, until less than a year before the heir to two million dollars, had become an absolute down-and-outer in that short space of time!

He had supposed it was going to be easy to prove to his father, who had cast him off with the wrathful assertion that he "never wanted to see his face again," that he could make good once he set himself to the task in earnest.

He had taken the night train from Pittsburgh to New York following that interview with his parent. In his pocket he had had nearly three thousand dollars, his winnings at bridge at the Crop and Stirrup Club that afternoon. Forty-eight hours later a "flier" in Wall Street that one of his so-called friends had advised him to make had left him with less than ninety dollars.

He had been down to his last ten-dollar bill before he had found what he had tramped the city from one end to the other in search of—a job of any kind, at any pay.

He had held that position—timekeeper, at a salary of twelve dollars and a half a week, in a brewery on the upper East Side—until seven weeks before. Then he had fallen sick.

He had lain in the charity ward of a hospital for more than a month. In the fortnight that had followed he had been unable to find a permanent place again. Odd jobs now and then, for barely enough to keep his soul and body together from one day to the next, were all he had been able to pick up.

Even such scanty employment he had now failed to secure since the previous morning, when he had made a dime by helping a truckman reload the packing-cases that had fallen off a vehicle when its tailboard had broken.

The next day would be Sunday. He couldn't hope to pick up the price of a meal or a night's lodging in one of the crowded "flop joints" on the Bowery then, with all the down-town business houses closed. And he couldn't hold out until Monday. His empty stomach, and the unsteadiness it had communicated to his knees, told him that.

Sickness had sapped his strength, as it had drawn from his face, sunken of cheek, hollow-eyed, and with a ten days' growth of beard covering it, all likeness to its former cheery good looks.

In the figure he presented as he stood with his arms resting on that post few among even his most intimate acquaintances would have recognized the William Caywood of old—collarless, his coat and trousers frayed and showing signs of having been frequently rain-soaked, and with the soles of his split shoes worn to paper-thinness by much tramping of the sidewalks.

Looking out over the harbor, he saw that the sky in the south was tinged with pink. Even as he looked, the glow took on a deeper hue. There must be a fire, he thought, somewhere down the bay on the New Jersey shore.

Turning, he inspected the near-by sky-scrapers that reared their darker bulks against the sable curtain of the night. They were picked out, here and there, by the yellow lights of the offices whose tenants were still at work.

Suddenly it came to him—the way out of the fix he was in.

Since it was steal or starve, he would steal. He shut his lips grimly, throwing back his shoulders with a deep breath. He had tried the honest way, to keep alive. It hadn't worked. Now, as many a better man before him had been driven to do by hunger, he would try the other.

"I'll be a thief, then!" he determined. "If they won't give me what I've asked the chance to work for and been denied—just the right to live—I'll take it!"

He shuffled out of the park and up Broadway. Behind him, though he was not aware of it, came the shabby man who had kept him in sight ever since his eyes had first rested on him in that squalid lunch-place.

Caywood's gaze was fixed steadily from under a menacing scowl on the lighted windows in those office buildings. Some one of those belated toilers must soon be going home. He would lie in wait for them in the nearly empty side streets leading to the subway or "L."

It might be only a clerk, with just a small amount of loose change in his pocket, that he would confront with the command to stand and deliver. Caywood meant to make him "come across" with whatever money he was carrying, nevertheless, with the threat to crack his head if he refused.

He wondered at himself. In the twinkling of an eye, it seemed, he had ceased to be a respecter of law and order, as befitted a member of the class to which he had been born. It was the slumbering primal instinct which adversity had awakened in him, he supposed, that enabled him to view without a single qualm of conscience this other and more desperate way of providing himself with food and shelter.

At the corner of Maiden Lane he halted, listening. Footsteps coming along the pavement in his rear had reached his ear. He drew back swiftly into the shadow of the building-line. This spot would do as well as any for the scene of his hold-up.

The footfalls of the solitary pedestrian came nearer. Caywood pulled down the brim of his hat and held himself in tense readiness to step forth and block the other's way.

Then he relaxed with a stifled exclamation of disappointment—or was it of relief?—as he saw who the man was. An outcast like himself, to judge from his ragged attire! There was no use waylaying him in the hope of getting hold of even a few cents. He watched the man slouch by—unconscious of the fact that this was the third time that night they had been within less than a yard of each other.

Caywood looked in through the thick plate glass of the spacious window beside him, at the two dozen or so fine watches that had been left on display by the jewelers' establishment at the close of the day's business. They would be a haul worth while for him, he mused.

Given the chance to scoop up and thrust out of sight about his clothes even half of those timepieces, he would be able to realize a hundred dollars, perhaps more, on the lot by visiting one pawn-shop after another when they opened again.

A hundred dollars! It was maddening to see such comparative riches so near at hand and yet where he couldn't get at them—

A roar, as of a dozen thunderclaps combined, smote his ears. He staggered back against the granite wall beside the window as the ground seemed to reel beneath his feet. Then, to right, left, all about him, he heard the crash of falling glass.

He didn't know what had happened. Nobody in New York at quarter past two that July morning did. Not for hours—in many cases not until the middle of the next day, which was the Sabbath—did the six million people who were awakened by that explosion as of the crack of doom itself, find out that it was caused by the blowing-up of six car-loads of ammunition that were awaiting shipment to the Allies in the freight-yards down the bay on the New Jersey shore.

There beside Caywood, where the window of that jewelry-store had been, yawned a void.

He had wished he might seize the watches he had seen, but been unable to touch, beyond that solid pane of glass. By a miracle, his wish had been granted—a second after he had formed it in his mind.

The glass strewed the pavement at his feet. He had only to reach in his hand through the vacant window-frame quickly, before any one came, to place himself beyond the fear of starvation for another month, or it might be two or three.

Without a second's hesitancy he stepped before the window. Then—strangely enough—he turned his back on it, squaring his shoulders in a protective attitude.

He was obeying the instinct of his caste, into which he had been jarred back by that cataclysmic roar and the sight of the ruin in its wake.

To have fallen to looting that window and the others whose contents had been laid bare all around him would have been the farthest thing from his thoughts a year before. He was doing now just what he would have done then. He was acting upon the impulse of any member of his station in life at such a time—to uphold law and order.

Caywood lifted up his voice in a wordless shout to the first person in sight. It was the man with the down-at-heel appearance who had passed him but the moment before, that came running back down the glass-littered sidewalk in response to his summons.

"Go and find a policeman!" Caywood ordered him. "I'll stay here to watch the stuff that's in this window till somebody gets here."

The man stepped nearer. His eyes traveled from the watches that lay within easy reach behind Caywood to that young man's face, and a shrewd gleam lighted them.

"Hold on a minute, bo," he said in a furtive undertone. "Do you know what you're doin'? Here's a chance throwed your way and mine to get out of the down-and-out class it looks like we was both in. We can fill our pockets and nobody—"

"I know what I'm doing," Caywood cut in shortly. "I'm telling you to get a policeman to come and stand guard over this stuff. Hurry up and do as I say!"

The man drew back, with what seemed to be a look of relief overspreading his face. From the corner below a whistle sounded. It was echoed, in the distance, by two or three others. An officer, with drawn club, came running toward them. The man in the ragged clothes who stood beside Caywood, jerked his head in his direction.

"The cops are coming," he said in a brisk, changed tone of voice, "to protect this rich harvest all around here from being gathered in by thieves. And now let me tell you something, young fellow: I'm glad I've found out that's not what you are. I've been following you for the past hour, to prove, if I could, whether you were what the first look I took at you made me think you were—honest. I've got a proposition to put up to you now."

He drew a bill from his pocket, unfolding it to let Caywood see that it was of twenty-dollar denomination.

"I'll pay you this," he went on, "if you'll act as my substitute for one week. I'm an operative of a private detective agency that's been engaged to locate a party who is thought to have dropped into the hobo ranks here in New York. My wife's sick, and I want to go home to Shamokin and see her.

"If I asked my firm to let me off, they might let me go and tell me I needn't come back; so I'm offering you—an honest chap in hard luck—a chance to earn twenty dollars by getting into conversation with park-bench loafers, and so on, as I've been doing, and trying to find out if any of them have met a fellow named William Caywood, whose father wants him to come home and bygones will be bygones—"

He broke off, steadying the other, who had swayed in his tracks.

"What's the matter?" he demanded solicitously. "You aren't sick, are you?"

The young man smiled at him faintly and shook his head.

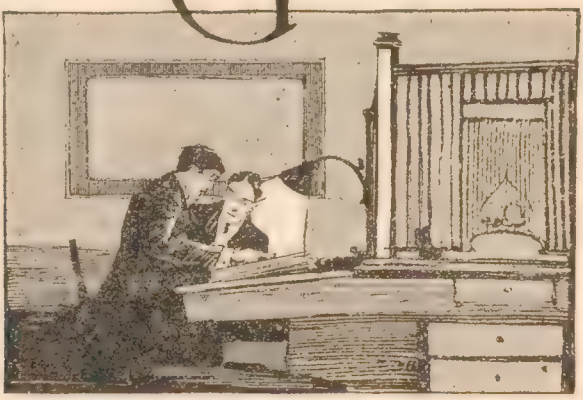
"Just a little weak, that's all," he told him. "You see, I'm Caywood."

INSUFFICIENCY.

"ONE kiss!" A paltry gift to Love:
Suppose the sea should say
Unto the shore—"I've sent one wave—
That's all you'll get to-day!"

Harry Kemp.

The Gilded Trap



by George M. A. Cain

Author of "From Dusk to Dark," "Four Speeds for Forest Hill," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE LOST KEY.

THE rattle of steel-net gates and the sharp clack of heels on the tiled floor, all a little louder and swifter on Saturday noon than on other afternoons, had come to an end. The last clerk but one had made his hurried exit from the Ironclad Trust Company's building for whatever sports and pleasures the first really warm half holiday of May might hold for them.

Bruce Evans alone stood before his high desk with ledgers and pen and ink before him.

"Aren't you through yet?"

The sharp voice startled him. He turned about to face Mr. Wheelock, the cashier of the Ironclad.

The fact that Wheelock seemed to dislike him had worried Evans for weeks. The cashier's tone put him instantly on the defensive.

"Why, I thought I'd better send a statement along with the notice to Jared Berg—he's overdrawn a few cents. The check just came in ten minutes before closing time. He's always kept a pretty good account here, and I thought we wouldn't want to send him a notice without a statement. He never brings in his book to balance, you know, since he never gets here."

"Oh," Wheelock uttered in a tone of relief. Somehow it seemed to Bruce the man had started a little at mention of Berg's name.

"Why, Berg's account is all right," Wheelock went on. "There are some notes due him to-day. I have them in my desk. You needn't bother about them. I'll fix it up to-morrow. I've several things to do here to-morrow, anyhow. As you say, Berg's too big a depositor to treat without consideration. It would have been bad if you'd sent him a notice."

"You have them in your desk?" Evans asked curiously.

"Yes, they had to do with a private transaction in which I was a sort of third party when I was in Bergville a couple of months ago," said Wheelock. "You can run along now, if that's all that's keeping you."

Evans indicated a big pile of envelopes on the next desk.

"Mercer told me to stamp those, seal them, and get them out," he told the cashier.

"Oh, all right. I'm going to get out and enjoy a little of this warm air myself.

By the way, I came out here to see if there was any one around to stamp some letters for me. Miss Jones got away before I noticed that they weren't done."

Bruce followed him back to his office. The extra letters to stamp gave him an added inward twist of feelings already sore enough; but he took them without a sign of protest.

"I don't mind," he answered Wheelock's apology for the request he had made. He waited until the cashier had betaken his well-groomed person from the place. Then—

"I guess I lied to him," he muttered. "I do mind. Confound it! He and Mercer always act as if it hurt them to see me around; and then pile on the extra work as though they had a right to. They get out to enjoy the nice spring days. I suppose they think I couldn't take any pleasure in them if I had the chance. Not so far wrong at that. You can't ride but three hours in this town for ten cents; and I'll have four left after I'm through with this outfit anyhow."

From a locker in the corner he got out a sponge and a little dish. At the sink in the hall he wet the sponge. Soon he was busy sealing the great pile of envelopes.

The warm weather had offered no real change to the monotony of Evans's existence. He was only twenty-six; yet his shoulders drooped and his general air was that of the old bookkeepers who have reached the knowledge that this life holds nothing better for them. Bruce Evans was a drudge. For three years he had been conscious of the fact.

Until lately there had been the consolation that he was a drudge for love's sake. His invalid sister had kept him too poor to strike out for anything better than the job for which he was too little fitted ever to make progress. Six months ago she had died. In another three weeks, barring sickness or accident, the expenses of her funeral would be wiped out. And then—

More drudgery. For five years he had been engaged to Ellen Randolph. Five years ago he had supposed he would soon be in a position to marry. He had not dreamed that his sister's illness would drag on, or that he would forever remain a sixteen-dollar bookkeeper.

And now—he couldn't ask Ellen to stretch patience any further. She protested that she was more than willing to live within his means. The wedding was set for August.

But he wasn't ready to marry. Not to-day—not most of the days of late. He was tired of the eternal counting of pennies; he wanted to live just a little.

Together he and Ellen had gone out to a tiny new suburb half a mile from an hour's trolley ride to the city and the bank. Together they had found a tiny cottage in a fair-sized yard with a chicken run at the rear.

Together—barring sickness and accident—they would go to live there in three months after a wedding the carefully counted expenses of which would be five dollars for the minister and twenty cents car-fare.

And Ellen was going to raise chickens in the run and sell eggs and broilers, which he could carry in to town customers by taking the trolley an hour earlier one or two mornings a week! And there was going to be a little garden which he could dig in afternoons for exercise. It would almost keep them in vegetables.

For the cottage and the "large, roomy, fertile plot" the real-estate company asked nothing down at all and the balance the same as rent! Ellen said it was perfectly wonderful.

It was a perfectly wonderful life for anybody that wanted to live it, Bruce thought now. Thus far ten Italian families had elected to try it in "Beautiful Midvale—Overlooking New Rochelle"—in much the same manner in which he could overlook the Singer Building from the sidewalk and see the sun above it. The Italian families seemed to like it—and Ellen.

There couldn't be a doubt that it suited Ellen. Sweet, patient, contented, and able to manage with little, just the sort of girl to be happy with a brood of chickens now and a brood of children later on—she said she didn't care if he never got any more than he was at present making, and she probably never would. She belonged to just the kind of quiet, monotonous rustic life that she had planned.

But did he? Was that the sort of thing he had hoped for when he worked his way through business college? Did he fit into her plan?

Ellen was all right. He loved Ellen. But he did wish she had a little more ginger, a little ambition to move about and have nice friends and live in a nice place like—

No, such a home as Wheelock's was not for him. No, he didn't wish that Ellen were a bit like Wheelock's daughter, who had flashed out of the house and back again the time Wheelock sent him up with a hundred dollars in bills because he had forgotten to draw them the night before. And yet—

He had finished the sealing. He trudged glumly across to the head bookkeeper's desk again. Automatically, for he had this envelope-stamping job to do frequently, his hand went around to the back of it where the key was always hung which opened the stamp drawer in the safe.

"Darn!" he grumbled.

Mercer's desk was heavy. It was like Mercer to drop the key and leave him to find it. He pulled the big thing out a few inches from the wall, straightened himself with a little grunt, bent down—

"*Darn! Damn!*"

It was not merely protest against the extra effort of pulling the desk farther out, of messing about in the dust behind it. It was rebellion against his whole scheme of life, against the humdrum of which he had so much that the least added straw must break his temper or his spirit. It was an outburst of hate against working through one day solely in order to be alive to work the next.

"Oh, *the devil!*"

Evans spoke the words slowly and with force enough to give them the violence of much worse profanity. The key was not under the desk. A glance showed that it was not on top. Another glance at the safe showed that it was not in the keyhole of the drawer.

"Damn Mercer!" he cried in an abandon of helpless rage very close to the verge of hysteria.

This was a specimen of the head bookkeeper's shiftlessness and incompetence. There was just one reason for Mercer's position; it was the big account of Mr. Josiah Wilbridge, who has sent the fellow down from Wendover Falls. Mercer was Wilbridge's nephew.

But what was Bruce going to do? The stamps were in that drawer. While the safe in which such trifling valuables were kept was something of a relic, there was little likelihood of cracking the lock with any tool at hand.

Evans counted the change in his pocket. That was easy. There was just thirteen cents. Up at the boarding-house he had fifty cents more, having paid his board and a dole of the funeral bill sufficient to leave him bare car-fare for the week. There wasn't enough altogether to stamp Wheelock's mail, not to consider the statements.

He looked hurriedly in some more likely places in which the key might have been laid. He looked in some less likely ones. He muttered another minor oath, in itself a symbol of his inward rebellion against that life of his which was usually too monotonous even to rise to an interest worth swearing at.

"Let the mail go to blazes!" he snapped like a man who can stand no more. He shoved the letters into a heap, banged shut the outer door of the safe, and twisted its handle with a vicious jerk.

For a moment in the outer vestibule he paused with the thought that Herman,

the janitor down in the basement, might have the money to buy stamps for those letters.

Herman was a miser in his way. Bruce had once tried to borrow car-fare from him when a hole in his pocket had leaked the solitary dime.

"The deuce with him!" spoke the nerve-tired bookkeeper, and closed the outside door.

In five minutes he was on a jammed elevated train, full of people with eager, animated, half-holiday faces. All of them were going somewhere, you could tell by the look of them. And he—

He was going to bed. It was one place where he could forget his troubles. Thank Heaven, he had kept the comfortable mattress that had been bought just a few months before his sister Alice's death. It was his one luxury.

He went to bed without eating the Saturday's lunch which was included in his weekly bill. But sleep would not come. He might vary between reckless moods in which he hoped they would fire him from the rotten grind the bank had grown to be to him, and moods when the mere thought of the "call-down" he would surely get struck terror to his soul. Neither mood was a soporific.

Finally he got up and went out to the nearest drug-store and fed twenty-one cents into a telephone box to call up Wheelock's home and warn him that the letters had not been sent. Of course it was his luck to get a maid on the wire to tell him Wheelock's whole family had gone motoring. He gave her a message, and was almost sure from her extreme accent that she neither understood nor would convey it.

It was the best he could do. He wished he had not done it. The twenty-one cents would cost him the movie show with Ellen this evening and make him walk home a couple of extra afternoons next week.

Well, it was too hot for the movies, anyhow. He didn't want pictures. He wanted a roof-garden with bright tints and cool drinks and—some life to it. He looked at himself in the glass. Wrinkles, gray hairs, even—and twenty-six. Oh, he was sick of it.

What he needed was a vacation. He thought of the country with the grass green, the brooks clear and alive, the trees bursting into blossom, lazy, lowing cattle—the real thing, of which Ellen's chicken-yard and garden would ever be only a cheap, home-made, unattractive imitation.

He was in precisely that frame of mind where fiction prescribes that the fairy godmother wave her wand and something happens to turn the ash-dump into a rose-bed. Only, it didn't happen just then. What did happen was in the nature of an extra scratch across his already chafed soul.

He had glanced out of the window, half-minded to alter his plans to a little walk through the nearest park. Past it, even as he looked, purred a little Ford touring-car. The top was turned back to get the full benefit of the lovely afternoon. And the occupants of the car were Mercer, Mercer's somewhat overdressed wife, and very much overdressed small boy.

A Ford car does not appeal to a lot of people as the acme of luxury. But there was another occupant of the rear seat. It was Mercer's maid. She might be the greenest sort of Polish help a housewife ever doubled her work to keep; but Mercer had her togged out in a nurse's uniform.

And Bruce Evans decided to go back to bed.

CHAPTER II.

THE PLANT.

SUNDAY had given Evans plenty of time to think things out and realize how utterly necessary it was for him to retain his job in the Ironclad Trust Company, long before he got there half an hour before opening on Monday morning. He was in mood to be apologetic, deferen-

tial, pleading. He was prepared to do almost anything short of going on his knees before Wheelock or the president to retain that job.

It might hurt his pride. He had long since learned that he could not afford much of that. His sister had needed medicine more than he needed his independence. And now a girl who had loved him all too faithfully deserved the meager little reward of her patience he could give her.

He was a moment ahead of the other bookkeepers, but not ahead of Wheelock. The cashier stood staring, glowering at the pile of unmailed letters. At Bruce's approach he turned his black gaze upon the humble culprit.

"Do you mind telling me what the devil this means?" he demanded.

Evans swallowed rage that all but choked him. He had decided on his course.

"Well," he said with a touch of indignation he had to keep from being the real rage he felt, "I can't mail letters without stamps. And I can't get stamps if they're locked in the drawer in the safe and the key lost."

"Where's the key?" Wheelock demanded, as is the wont of men in a wrath at an inferior.

"I don't know. All I know is that it's not where it's supposed to be, or anywhere else where I could find it." Evans maintained his injured tone.

It was at this moment that Mercer entered. Wheelock turned upon him with what appeared to be unmodified anger.

"Mercer, where's the key to the stamp-drawer in the safe? Evans says it wasn't where you always keep it."

Mercer went to his desk, felt of the hook behind it. "Deuced funny," he said easily. "I hadn't had it all day."

The other two bookkeepers came in. Wheelock halted them before they could go to the clothes-lockers to hang up their hats.

"Which of you've taken the stamp-drawer key?" he roared at them.

They all looked nonplused. All expressed surprise at the query. They had none of them been to the stamp-drawer in a week or more.

"Well, some one's taken it." Four clerks drifted in. "Have you fellows had the stamp-drawer key?" Wheelock fired at them.

They hadn't. They were unanimous in being sure of it. Mercer went through the motions of looking behind his desk.

"I pulled the desk clear away from the wall Saturday," Bruce stated.

The result of the search corroborated that statement.

"Oh, well, the key's somewhere," snarled Wheelock. "It can't walk off of its own accord. Some of you fellows have it in your desk, I suppose, or in your pockets. Get busy. Those letters—My Lord!" Wheelock had suddenly recalled his own mail being with the other. "Say, didn't you get my letters off?"

"Couldn't get any of them off," Bruce protested.

Wheelock appeared on the point of bursting as he hurled unprintable words at the unfortunate young man and demanded why in the subcellar of Tophet Bruce hadn't gone out and bought stamps.

Evans had turned, like the rest, to his desk and the task of searching its drawers. He could not have looked into the cashier's face without throwing an ink-bottle at it. His hand trembled more with rage than with fear of the dread consequences of his misfortune.

"I didn't have any money with me," he explained.

"Didn't have the price of a few stamps? What the devil do you do with your pay?" thundered the irate cashier.

"I don't know as I'm expected to carry about enough money to buy stamps for the bank," Bruce permitted himself to protest. "As a matter of fact, I've been paying for my sister's funeral and allowing myself about car-fares. I took enough out of that to telephone your house, and all I could get was a maid

who didn't speak English enough to understand my message, I suppose."

Half of the explanation was lost as Wheelock continued his abuse. He stepped around to get a better angle from which to hurl his imprecations. Evans had shoved back some yellow pads on which he was wont to do figuring that might not go on the books or statements.

"*What's that?*" For a fraction of a second Wheelock had stopped his tirade in the middle of a word, before he shifted to the awful question.

In that half second Bruce had emitted a gasp of as sheer terror as if he had uncovered a rattlesnake. Now he clutched at the sides of the desk and stared at the thing in blank amaze.

It was the stamp-drawer key.

Sheer terror! Bruce Evans might not have feared to mix things in a fistic battle with the man who had already uttered epithets no man should bear unchallenged; though Wheelock was much the bigger physical specimen of the two, and Evans's muscles had long lacked anything like real exercise.

His terror was that of the man who cannot, dares not fight. It was the result of his long schooling in necessity—the necessity of others on whose behalf he must suffer things to which he himself might prefer starvation; of a schooling that had ground and stamped into his very soul as the supreme rule of his life that he could not, must not lose his job, that to do so was worse than death.

As Wheelock lifted the thin strip of metal the whole room seemed to whirl. There was a hush that was like one of those terrible stillnesses before a cyclone, with all nature seeming to crouch for a herculean spring that carries death and destruction before it.

Then it seemed to Bruce that he must say something. He could hardly recognize his own thin, weak voice as he spoke the truth:

"I never put it there."

And the impending tornado burst.

"No, I suppose not. I suppose it flew there. There were only a few hundred thousand dollars depending on its being in its place, so it got up and flapped its wings and crawled through the keyhole of your drawer and hid itself. And of course you couldn't find it. You were too damned lazy to move a few papers and look for it. You—"

"I moved all those papers," Evans protested, his hand raised as if warding off a blow. "Somebody else put it there."

For the thing had suddenly flashed in his tormented brain. He was the victim of a plant.

Mercer disliked him; had disliked him for over a year. He could not tell why. He knew it was true. And Mercer had taken that key and then—

"Somebody put it there, eh? Of course somebody would come in here and take the trouble to put that key away all nice and snug in your drawer! Of course you couldn't have done it. I suppose you saw some one do it."

"I know all right who did it," snapped Bruce, his eyes full upon the head bookkeeper.

"Mercer, did you put that key in Evans's desk and cover it up with papers so as to hide it and keep him from sending out the mail?"

Wheelock asked the question in a tone of pure irony. Mercer grinned.

"He says he searched the drawer Saturday afternoon. You can ask the janitor if I've been here since." The head bookkeeper spoke his alibi with the laugh of assured security from an impossible accusation.

"It's a wonder you don't say I did it," sneered the cashier. "It's only cost me a few thousand dollars."

"What's the matter, Wheelock?"

Unnoticed, Mr. Bennet, the president of the bank, had come in from his office at the front. Since he did not come to the bank at all on most days and hardly ever before noon, his presence was a surprise all around.

"This idiot," snapped Wheelock. "We left him to send out the statements

and a lot of other important mail. And he's put the key of the stamp-drawer in his desk and then forgotten it. He hasn't the price of the stamps on him, so all the mail can lie here from Saturday afternoon!"

"How did that happen?" Bennet demanded.

He was of the sort who do not easily display wrath. Now he merely raised his eyebrows as if irritated more by the row than the cause of it. His query was directed at Evans.

"I don't know how it happened," Evans confessed. "I know I did not leave the key in my desk. I hunted through it when I couldn't find the key where it's always kept on the back of Mr. Mercer's. I hadn't enough money to buy the needed stamps. I tried to telephone Mr. Wheelock about it, but could not get him. I—"

"Well, don't waste any more time about it. It seems to me it's very careless, though. If such a thing happens again, Wheelock, just fire somebody. We can't have that sort of thing in this place." Bennet turned back to the front of the bank.

"That's better than I'd have done for you," snapped Wheelock. "You're lucky he came in and saved you from being fired now."

He stood as if waiting for some answer, then turned into his own office, next behind that of the president.

And Mercer gave vent to a little laugh.

It was the last straw on the back of the overpatient drudge. Evans suddenly saw red. From his lips burst a string of oaths such as he had never uttered in his life before.

All the petty tyrannies, all the extra jobs Mercer had heaped upon him, arose before and within him. Upon that weighed the conviction that Mercer held his place solely through favoritism built upon the fact that his uncle was the owner of the bank's heaviest bulk of deposit.

"Some day," he finished a tirade more vitriolic than Wheelock's, and only absurd because of the helplessness of the speaker to make it more than a bluster of words —"some day Josiah Wilbridge will take his account out of this bank, and I guess something will drop around here."

They were foolish words, sheer bluster; an instant's reflection would have told him not to utter an insinuation for which he had nothing in the way of proof. They frightened him a little when he had spoken them.

He stopped, scared at his own boldness and folly. Then he suddenly realized that he had said something unusual. The face of the man he addressed had been growing red under the torrent of futile vituperation. His lips had parted over grinding teeth, and he had taken a step toward Evans's desk with his fists clenching as he came.

Now the lips parted farther, and the teeth fell apart to permit a gasping suck of air. The face changed color. Evans realized that the whole room seemed charged with static force on the edge of an explosion.

Then he perceived that Mercer's eyes were shifting to something beyond his own face, that in them was some telegraphic appeal. Hardly had this impression—it had no time to become a thought—crossed his mind, when he heard Wheelock's voice again.

"Get back to your work, you fellows," the cashier snarled. "Evans, you come here."

CHAPTER III.

OPEN SESAME.

AS he followed the cashier Bruce Evans felt something as a mouse no doubt would feel, if he had time, when the nibbling of a cheese-bait is followed by its cataclysmic effect.

To hint at the favoritism he suspected had been foolish; but even more reasoning consideration could hardly have led him to expect it to result so startlingly. He had spoken rather because he believed

he was speaking himself into rapport with his fellow subordinate bookkeepers than for any real effect he had expected upon the man he addressed.

"Sit down, Evans," commanded the cashier, carefully shutting the door of his glass-incased room.

As Evans dropped into a seat, Wheelock settled slowly, it seemed thoughtfully, into the swivel chair before the wide mahogany desk.

Something moved within Evans. He felt that he was to be fired now inevitably. Bending before the tyranny of this man or Mercer could do no good. Wherefore, he was through bending.

Wheelock gazed into his face. Evans gazed back defiantly. The cashier suddenly dropped his gaze, and picked up a paper-cutter that lay upon one of the sliding tablets protruding from the desk's front. This he balanced over a finger. It seemed a symbol of what he was doing with something else in his mind. Evans concluded that his own fate was still balancing.

He had lost the faculty for trying to throw on something to weigh in his favor. He let Wheelock do his own thinking and stared on at the other's face.

Wheelock glanced up, glanced down again at the teetering paper-knife. Finally, with a sigh, he chucked the cutter to the back of the desk. He drew a long breath, expelled it, took another which seemed to shake a little as it sucked into his throat.

"Evans," he spoke at last, "I'm a little surprised at you."

Bruce made no response. His faculties were dulled, stunned.

"I—really, Evans—I thought you had a little more sense," Wheelock began again. And something in his voice puzzled Bruce more than the harshest of tones would have done. The cashier might have been arguing with a friend and equal about some mistake.

"You've always seemed a pretty sane sort of man, Evans. I thought you'd be able to see that what I said was only for the disciplinary effect. I'm a good bit disappointed that you should have blown up like this afterward."

And now Evans felt giddy. He had prepared himself for a kick into the supernal air; instead, he was being gently lowered—somewhere.

"It wasn't good business, Evans," Wheelock went on. "A good business man doesn't talk for nothing—nor just because his feelings are hurt. Of course Mercer is a good bit of an ass and all that; but I'm quite sure there's no reason for thinking any worse of him than that."

Evans had not thought worse of him. He wondered what Wheelock meant. He wondered why Wheelock eyed him so queerly.

"I don't know quite what you meant by what you said to him." The cashier spoke with a little more sharpness.

Evans felt that he had got over being frightened. He had faced the worst that could happen.

"I guess you do," he heard himself saying with a flash of heat at the changed tone on the cashier's part.

And Wheelock stared at him again, not less than a full half minute, then dropped his eyes once more.

"Evans, you're not feeling well," the cashier suddenly remarked irrelevantly. "You've been working and worrying too much. When is your vacation coming?"

"August, I guess," Bruce responded curtly. That there was a hint here of his remaining in the bank had lost its appeal as the fear of losing the place had lost its terror.

"Um-m-m," hummed Wheelock. He was still a totally different man from the one Evans had thought he knew rather too well. "That's a long time off. Still, it upsets things dreadfully to change. Where do you live? What sort of a place is it?"

Bruce mentioned his boarding-house.

"Not much of a joint, is it? You don't look as if they handed you many mushrooms around the side of big, juicy steaks, eh?"

Evans's expression was solely of wonder.

"I'm afraid I've been a little too severe some of the time." Wheelock suddenly became apologetic. "You understand that things are not just as they should be—I've had a lot of worry. Business is all mixed up—the war has set all sorts of fly-by-night schemes going after the long depression, and—perhaps I've made some mistakes in some—of the people I've trusted."

Why in the dickens did the man stare that way? Evans suddenly felt a glimmer of sympathy for the tired look in those searching eyes.

"I'll tell you," Wheelock seemed to reach a determination. "There's a widow up in my town keeps a nice little summer boarding-house. How much have you been sparing to feed yourself with—your board, I mean?"

"Five dollars a week," Bruce confided.

"All right. Your car-fare will be double. We'll call it four. I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I believe we can make things enough lighter here for the present so that you can stand them, if you've only the right sort of environment and decent grub outside. You can pay Mrs. Breen just four dollars, and I'll make up the difference until you're better on your feet again."

Evans could not believe his ears. Was this Wheelock? Was he Bruce Evans? What had happened? Then something reminded him of the things some of the papers had to say about charities for the poor instead of just wages.

"I could not do that, Mr. Wheelock," he said.

"Why not?"

"I couldn't pay you back," Evans explained.

And Wheelock searched him again with those tired eyes. Once he got back the old ugly look for a second; then this disappeared.

"You'll pay me back—in better work," he urged.

This was as inexplicable as everything else about the man's changed manner. Evans was not working for the cashier. The cashier really profited and lost nothing by his work one way or the other. Wheelock was a salaried officer, not a director.

"You won't do it?" Wheelock asked.

"I'd rather not do anything I can't pay for myself," Evans replied.

"Um-m-m-m," the cashier hummed a second time. Then he broached a new idea. "Well, I don't blame you for that," he said, though his eyes were still trying to read through Bruce's brain. "But, for the sake of the bank, you've got to do something. Tell you what. I haven't time to think or talk about it now. You come up with me to dinner to-night.

"Never mind about dress—we don't dress half the time, anyhow. Just as you are. I'll take you for a little spin and show you a bit of God's country. You can't refuse a straight invitation like that, old man.

"I won't take no for an answer. Now, give those letters to Jackson, out there, and don't try to kill yourself over the books to-day. When you're feeling a little better you'll easily make up if they run behind a trifle. Some of those other loafers out there can take some of your work. Send me Mercer."

He pressed a button on his desk as he spoke.

Evans did not need to send the head bookkeeper. He had finished taking the envelopes to Jackson, and was taking down the ledgers, his mind still whirling in dazed wonder, when Mercer came back.

"Sorry I laughed when I did, old sport," Mercer spoke almost affectionately. "As a matter of fact, something happened to remind me of a joke I heard at a show Saturday night. Now, I'll tell you what we're going to do. You're to let Travis take all the R to V books, and you just run the W to Z until next fall.

"I didn't really notice that you were getting so run down. I'm a hell of a dub, anyhow. But don't hold a grudge. There's

nothing in that, you know. And "—he lowered his voice—"don't spit out all you know again like that. You might make trouble for somebody."

"It's all right."

Evans spoke the trite phrase of forgiveness almost automatically. But he checked the impulse to say that he really could manage to take care of the full number of books ordinarily allotted to him. Few enough favors had been shown him; he need not go out of his way to dodge what were long overdue.

"Got any engagement for lunch?" asked Mercer.

For a moment Evans could not realize that he was being extended another invitation. Not in all the while he had worked at the Ironclad Trust Company had any one thought of inviting him to lunch.

"No, nothing special." He managed to repeat the words with which other men answered the query just put to him.

"I want to take you to a little club I belong to. You'll meet some good fellows there," said Mercer, so much as if he meant it that Bruce could ill afford to question it.

"Why," almost gasped the surprised young man, "I'll be delighted. I—I'm not very much on lunch ordinarily, though."

"You look it," Mercer responded blithely.

It is of no use to pretend that Bruce Evans did any work that morning. He was in a daze. All the things that distinguish real fellows from sheer drudges had happened to him at once. He had been invited to eat with other men, with the head bookkeeper, with the cashier at his own home. They were trying to make things easy for him instead of hard; they were wanting to provide rest and comfort for him.

What was the answer? That something lay behind this he was too shrewd to doubt. But what could it be?

Underneath this sudden outburst of friendly consideration was some fear. They were scared by his understanding the favoritism which kept Mercer in his place. His hint to that effect seemed to have touched some secret spring that had opened to him hitherto undreamed of things.

That Mercer's position was due entirely to his relationship with the big country depositor was evidently more of a secret than he had supposed—or Mercer and Wheelock thought it more of a secret than it was.

As a matter of fact, it had been more or less whispered about by the other clerks as the explanation of the superior place for the inferior man. Bruce had not thought but that such whisperings must have got back to Mercer time and again.

It seemed they hadn't. He concluded that the president must have extreme notions of fairness, and that Wheelock and Mercer were anxious to keep their little game secret.

Their alarm about it could scarcely last them long. Bruce had no desire to "graft" upon their fear. But common justice to himself gave him some right to take what compensation was coming to him for the long time in which neither of them had given him a fair deal. He half wished he had accepted Wheelock's offer of board in the beautiful suburb.

The club to which Mercer took him confirmed a belief he had long entertained. The head bookkeeper's uncle evidently provided him with a subsidy over and above his salary. Years since he had known what the bookkeepers got. Almost all of them got a dollar or two more than he. But Mercer's wage was not more than twenty-five dollars a week.

It was no millionaires' club. Only a drudge like Evans would have regarded it as wonderfully extravagant. Probably he overestimated the costliness of things. But he was quite sure that no man could keep an automobile and a family and belong to such a club on twenty-five dollars a week.

That Mercer did not have to earn all he got was no affair of Bruce's, the latter concluded. It was for him to enjoy as

best he might, considering that his wellnigh threadbare black suit contrasted too markedly with the light spring garments of the club members. And he enjoyed it all thoroughly in spite of his self-consciousness.

The food and the cheap red wine served at the place gave his unaccustomed stomach an attack of uncomfortable indigestion through the afternoon. Even that did not destroy the effect of Mercer's words:

"You ought to join this club. Nice bunch of fellows—the sort that can put a man next to something once in a while, too. Chase, at the head of the table—the big, fat fellow—is manager of Kent's brokerage. He put me wise to the jump in Amalgamated Zinc. I just happened to have enough to clean up a couple of thousand on it. Any time you want to get in, I'll put up your name. The dues are only fifty a year."

That which interested Evans most was not the confession of Mercer that he had committed the unpardonable sin for a bank clerk of playing the stock market. Actually that tempted more than it shocked. But Bruce was really serious in consideration of the invitation to join the club. That which three hours before would have seemed beyond thought had become a desire, almost a hope.

CHAPTER IV.

A CHANCE FOR MONEY.

"ALL ready, Evans?"

Wheelock, with hat, stick, and gloves, was standing in the door of the bookkeeping office. Bruce had hurried the closing of his ledgers and put them away, was just donning his two-seasoned derby.

The great event of the day was really coming to pass. Evans had suffered more than spasms of fear that the dream would burst before closing time. It hadn't.

"Nice day for a spin," Wheelock remarked as they reached the street. Then, "What will you read?" he asked, as a newsboy ran up to them.

Even the news had been a comparatively rare luxury to Bruce since his sister's death. Before that a neighbor had always sent a paper in to her less than half a day old, and he had got the morning news on reaching home in the afternoon. Since then he had depended upon the indifferent luck of having some one get off a car ahead of him and leaving a paper within reach.

"I have tickets," the cashier mentioned, as he led the way from the foot of the subway stairs. Then, as they crowded into the car, he grumbled, "Rotten way to travel. If real estate wasn't so dead, I'll sell my place in the country and live in a flat."

Unquestionably his manner was patronizing. It was not of the sort at which one could take offense. Rather it appeared to try all the while to bridge and smooth over the chasm between their positions with kind consideration. He even urged Bruce to take the first seat left vacant as the passengers began to thin out well up in the Bronx.

The spruce touring-car that waited at the end of the line was not the first automobile Evans had ever boarded. Four years before, when Alice had not been so bad as she soon became, he and she had disported grandly with occasional rides on a Fifth Avenue motor-bus. And the first time he and Ellen had gone to see the place of their hoped-for home and chicken yard, the trip had been on a real-estate company's free excursion, with a dozen jitney-cars provided for the final half mile.

"Brought an extra duster, didn't you?" Wheelock asked of the chauffeur. And the man produced one which, being of the cashier's size, hung about the bookkeeper like an enormous poncho.

"Run us through the park, Clifford, and up through Pelham," ordered the cashier.

And the dream became more dreamlike than ever, with a real car spinning

smoothly and silently through space over rolling hills and through woods, past beautiful little suburbs and big suburban estates, glimpsing here and there bits of placid water on which danced motor-boats and a few sailing yachts, grass and flowers and shade and soft breeze and motion—all blended into comfort raised to sheer luxury.

At lunch-time Evans had begun to want a club. Now he found himself wondering if he might not, somehow, some time, own an automobile.

They stopped at a little road-house somewhere, and Wheelock insisted that a cocktail was one of the things Bruce needed for the general bracing of his health. It set his ears ringing a little and his brain reeling just enough to add to the pleasure of the motion in the car as they turned back from the Sound shore and headed westward. He was having hard work to keep from falling into a blissful doze, when—

"George! How can folks keep alive in a swamp like this?" grunted his companion.

Bruce looked about. They had gone down a slight incline into a rather marshy hollow, then almost imperceptibly up. On the soft, sandy soil were tiny houses, with dark-faced babies playing on door-steps in front of yards so poorly fenced that chickens and a stray goat were scurrying from before the purring motor.

Then Bruce's look became a stare. It was—no—yes—

There was the very spot Ellen had selected for their future home! Bruce shuddered.

He had never thought of the swamp before; he knew in a moment that he had not seen it, since the road before him was the one over which he had always come from the station.

How could folks live in such a place? How could he ever bring himself to it? He couldn't. He wouldn't. Other men made money—Wheelock, Mercer—got it somehow.

Certainly he could aspire to Mercer's position. Why not to Wheelock's? Why should he imagine that he must always remain a sixteen-dollar bookkeeper? There was plenty of money in the world. Surely he was capable of earning some of it. If something didn't turn up for him in the Ironclad, he would chuck the place and look for another.

And Ellen?

She was all wrong about going out to that swamp. Chickens, a muddy garden! Bah! If she wanted that sort of thing, he didn't; she would have to learn to want more; she would have to wait until he could provide more.

"Well, here we are. Did you enjoy the ride? By George! you've got better color already." They had swung up a little drive before the square, white stucco house with the red tile roof which Evans had once visited as an errand-man. Now he was to be a guest!

"Come up-stairs and tidy up a bit," invited his host.

The stairs were so hard and smooth they seemed dangerously slippery. Wheelock threw open a door into a bedroom which might have been no more than fourteen feet square, but seemed to Evans a sinful waste of space around the single bed in it.

"You can use my bathroom—I'll go to the other one," Wheelock said, and indicated what amazed Evans still further, the first tiled bathroom he had ever seen in a private residence.

What, he wondered, must it be to have such luxuries for daily use? It seemed to him that the very cold water was of a quality more delightful and bracing than at Mrs. Lundrum's. But that was due to the afterthirst and slight fever of the cocktail, though he did not know it.

A glance into the full-length mirror rather shocked him. He had never so fully realized how ill-clad he was. His coat was shiny at the elbows; his trousers bagged at the knees; his tie was frayed, his collar—

He hastily took that off and painstakingly turned it inside out. Thank

Heaven, it was Monday. Later in the week both sides would have been worn. By patient effort he managed to knot his tie so as to conceal all the thread-bare spots.

Still, it was a dingy-looking thing. He rather dreaded meeting Miss Wheelock more than any other part of the ordeal before him.

At last he had attained the best that could be done with what he had. Still he had to wait a few moments in the wonderful bed-chamber, before Wheelock came in.

"You really ought to have let me go home and put on another suit," he apologized.

He could not help the bit of bluff. His only other suit he was saving from the ragman for work with Ellen's chickens and garden.

"Forget it," cheerfully bade his host. Then, after a glance, he added: "Say—you don't mind my offering it, old man? But I've a whole lot of mourning ties left over from last year—father died, you know. Wish you'd take them. They give me the blues when I see them, and I haven't had the heart to chuck them away."

Wheelock had unbuttoned the top of his shirt to wash. Even his underwear was silk! Bruce decided to change the old tie before facing his host's daughter. Wheelock's worn ones were vastly newer-looking than Evans's had ever been after the first wearing.

"Now run along down and turn to your right into the library, while I get into my duds."

Bruce ran along down. He was glad to find the library empty. Somehow every minute of waiting was making the meeting with the ladies more difficult to contemplate.

Then, almost before he realized it, the worst was over. Miss Wheelock had come in, looked about the room an instant, turned as if to walk out, then turned back and walked toward him. She was arrayed in—Heaven knew what. Bruce only knew that it was something wonderful, and was quite sure that it went splendidly with her dark hair and eyes, her almost olive skin.

"Oh, pardon me," she exclaimed; "I didn't see you. You're Mr. Evans, aren't you? We don't stand on ceremonious introductions here. Besides—haven't I met you before?"

Bruce recalled the package he had brought up for her father. She flashed a smile of recollection upon him.

"I was sure I remembered you," she told him. And he felt deeply flattered. It appeared a bit of deference on her part that she should ask him the trite question:

"How do you like White Plains Manor?"

"Oh, very much," he answered.

He all but choked over the words. His head was swimming again, worse than the cocktail had made it swim. That a woman like this should ask his opinion of anything! It surely was a novel sensation.

Had he taken thought and time to try, he would have had difficulty in recalling when any one had asked his opinion. Alice had been pettish most of the time, the result of her sickness, and domineering. Ellen—well, she had decided where they were to live, all right. Miss Wheelock gave him a sudden feeling that he was quite capable of deciding things if he had the chance.

They chatted about the weather. That is, Miss Wheelock chatted. Bruce felt that he was giving the impression of being monosyllabic pulp. He tried to think of something really clever to say. He braced himself to look into her face and, at least, to appear humanly intelligent.

And her father came in to the rescue.

"Hello," he exclaimed. "I see you two are getting acquainted. Phew! Jessie. You're all togged up. Going somewhere, aren't you?"

"I was," Jessie replied.

Evans had suddenly forgotten his embarrassment enough to turn his eyes toward her for the reply. He could not

have told whether he hoped she would go or not.

"I don't know," she added hesitantly, with a demure look toward Bruce. It took him a second to realize what was required of him.

"Oh, don't go, please," he said almost too earnestly.

"I don't really want to," the girl replied. Then to her father she explained: "It's Winnie Bedford's little fête, you know." Her tone deprecated the affair.

"Why, I thought you were quite crazy about it," Wheelock stated. "But do as you like, of course. You always do, anyhow."

"I don't really feel like going," Jessie answered. "I'm going to telephone over that I have a headache."

"Lucky she can't see you," chuckled her father. "You don't look a bit like a headache."

Jessie laughed. There was something intimate in the laugh over her intended prevarication, and it took Bruce in with a twinkle of her heavy-lashed eyes.

"Look out for her, Evans," teased Wheelock. "She has all the youth of the Manor dangling after her. She's a devil with youthful hearts."

"Daddy!" the girl pouted mirthfully, and went off to telephone.

There was a more formal introduction to Mrs. Wheelock, who came in an instant later—a plump, pretty woman, for whose slight overdress Bruce was quite incompetent to render anything but admiration.

It suddenly occurred to Evans that the use of rouge was not essentially demi-monde. Mrs. Wheelock talked rapidly, a trifle loud, in a highly animated imitation of English accent that struck Bruce as his first hearing of really refined speech.

She did not remain long with them. Explaining that she had a tiresome dinner-engagement, she begged to be excused. Then she expressed her delight at knowing Bruce and the hope that they would see lots of him—

"During the summer. You really won't find the Manor half bad in summer. In winter it is simply unbearable. I feel that it's an imposition to ask any one to come up here in cold weather."

"Don't forget Evans, now," warned Wheelock. "He's going to be paying-teller down at the bank."

Bruce only looked up quickly. Would wonders never cease?

"Oh, it's ever so much more important that the paying-teller should remember me," laughed the lady. "But there's not the slightest danger of my forgetting Mr. Evans. I hope he isn't going to give us the chance."

And dinner was served. Bruce declined another cocktail before it; but he drank a little of the delicious wine. Between the wine and the hint of speedy promotion he got a sense of strange elation. He could have counted on his fingers and toes the glasses of beer he had drunk in his life before.

With the little cup of black coffee to take the slight fog from his brain, he was prepared to acquit himself in the after-dinner conversation. Mr. Wheelock manipulated the player-piano, and Jessie insisted upon teaching Bruce one of the new dances.

Then some other friends dropped in, and Jessie had to leave them. Wheelock told her to do so, since he wanted to talk a little business with Evans.

"Yes, I think I'll be able to fix you up with the assistant paying-teller's job. Meyer will be going in another month or two. We'll just let you spend a little time in the cage with him and Johns each day, until you get the run of the game."

Bruce tried to say some words of thanks.

"Don't bother about that, old man. It's coming to you. I haven't realized it before. I really feel guilty about it all. You know, you've never stood up and yelled about yourself enough to make us notice that you were around. And, if I can, I'm going to try to help you in some other ways. I think I can.

"Perhaps you know that more people

are making money in Wall Street these days than ever before in its history. Of course we're not expected to speculate. Of course you know that the rule is a joke. We've just as good a right to what's going around as any one else. And some of us need it worse than those who are getting it. When I get a chance I'm going to put you in for something."

Was it a wonder that Bruce Evans went home in a whirl? Jessie had left her friends in the sun-room to come and bid him good night. She had turned to her father those dazzling eyes of hers and mirthfully inquired:

"Of course you asked Mr. Evans up for the week-end, didn't you, daddy dear?"

"I didn't, but I was going to," Wheelock hastily responded.

"Oh, I don't know," Bruce had gasped. "Of course I'd be more than delighted. But—"

"No buts about it," Wheelock interrupted. "You're coming."

Just as he was climbing into his bed he recalled with a stab of conscience that he had promised Ellen to see her that evening. She had discovered a little bungalow plan that she liked better than any of the others they had discussed in the past year and a half.

Well, he could explain to Ellen tomorrow evening. Anyhow, with promotion in sight, with Wheelock hinting of chances to make money on the side, nothing could be more foolish than settling on a tiny, two-by-four house on a sand lot out there by the marsh. Chickens! A mud garden!

He wondered what Ellen would look like in such a gown as Miss Wheelock had worn this evening. Somehow the wondering was not pleasant. Besides, he had another matter to think of.

If he was going into the teller's cage, to face the general public, he would need some new clothes. His week's pay would come Friday afternoon as usual. That would be in time to get the needed garments for the week-end.

And there was no sense in wearing mourning any longer—except as to ties, perhaps.

CHAPTER V.

THE GIRL WITH RIGHTS.

"WELL, give an account of yourself," Ellen bade Bruce with a laugh, when he appeared in her parents' very modest flat the following evening.

Bruce had decided not to talk too much about the sudden change in his prospects. Somehow he could not convince himself that they were entirely real.

"Mr. Wheelock asked me out to his place, and I had to go, of course," he explained. "I knew your bungalow plan could wait another day."

"Mr. Wheelock asked you out to his place!" echoed the girl.

For a second Bruce almost imagined her eyes held a trace of the sparkle which so wonderfully animated the eyes of the girl with whom he had conversed last evening. Then he reflected that comparisons are odious. Comparing Ellen's looks with Jessie Wheelock's could not be other than odious to one who was bound by all ties to marry Ellen.

Ellen was a drab little creature. Some men might have seen, on second glance, in her face and carriage a very admirable gentle dignity. Few men ever troubled to give that second glance.

For years Bruce Evans had been filled with awed wonder as to what she saw in a dull drudge like himself on which to lavish a love so true and enduring. He had counted her affection the light of his otherwise dingy existence.

Now other light had suddenly shone in upon his life. Already the prospect was for a change from existing to living. The promised shift of position in the bank carried an extra seven or eight dollars of salary. To one accustomed to figuring in pennies seven dollars seems a lot of money. It was twenty-eight dollars a month, three hundred and sixty-odd

dollars a year, if not thirty-six thousand cents to Bruce Evans.

"Yes," he responded to Ellen's exclamation. "I don't know what struck him and Mercer. Mercer took me out to lunch at his club; Wheelock gave me a couple of hours' motor ride. I think the world's coming to an end."

He was telling the truth. He didn't know what had caused the sudden change in the attitudes of the cashier and head bookkeeper. In considering Mercer old wounds still rankled so that he could have harbored a faint suspicion that the two thought he knew something much more serious than favoritism. But Wheelock—was Jessie Wheelock's father.

Of course he was not such a fool as to have fallen in love with the girl. Of course he was and would be absolutely loyal to her who had been his promised bride for long, hard years. But—

He wasn't anxious to know anything against Jessie Wheelock's father.

"Oh," Ellen exclaimed, "I do hope it's going to mean something better for you."

The thoughts of his heart bubbled over in spite of his resolution:

"There's a little talk of making me assistant paying-teller. No use counting chickens, of course. But—it's twenty-four per, if I get it."

"Bruce!" the girl cried in delight. Her eyes were as bright as Jessie Wheelock's —almost.

Evans took the occasion to administer a kiss.

"I always knew it was in you," she remarked, as is the manner of loving women from all generations.

"It isn't out yet," he warned with a laugh.

"But it's bound to come out," Ellen prophesied firmly. "Bruce, I was wondering whether to show you that bungalow plan or not. I got to figuring on it, and I'm almost sure they'll want a hundred more to build it than the one we talked to them about."

She had gone to the table and, taking up a catalogue of ready-built houses, turned back to the page showing the cheapest of summer bungalows. The one to which she pointed was marked three hundred and seventy-five dollars. In the book it looked much tastier than the other houses at Sunnyville, if a bit smaller.

"Of course we'd have to figure on seven hundred and fifty with the cellar and all—we know they always come double these prices. But—isn't it worth it?" Ellen inquired.

"Say, Ellen, we rode through Sunnyville yesterday. Did you ever notice that it's on the edge of a swamp?" Bruce returned, hardly glancing at the catalogue.

"A swamp?" the girl echoed. "There's a little bit of marsh there, if that's what you mean. They've been filling it up all the time. What's left is almost all under tide-water when the tide is up. I'm sure the place isn't unhealthy, Bruce."

"Well, maybe not. But, Ellen—who wants to live in a hole like that with a lot of foreigners, anyhow?"

"Those Harrises who were buying a lot next to ours were Americans," Ellen argued. "And the others were a nice, quiet class of Italians. I—"

"Oh, those Harrisses!" Bruce broke in. "Harris is a cheap, non-union carpenter who's building the houses for the company. You know that. And his wife!"

"Why, Bruce!" the girl cried with a note of alarm and just a trace of combat. "Mrs. Harris was a school-teacher. I know where she taught. And the children were dear little things."

"How many were there?" Bruce asked in a tone that laughed at the size of the Harris family.

"Four, and I wish I owned every one of them." Ellen spoke with a ring of genuine defiance.

"I don't," Bruce contested.

Ellen stared at him thoughtfully.

It appeared that she had suddenly come to doubt certain preconceived and other well-established notions about her husband-to-be. Then she returned to the main contention.

"But, Bruce, we decided that Sunnyville was the best thing we could possibly afford. We don't want to live in a cheap flat. We want something better than a collection of rent-receipts. We—"

"It may have been the best thing we *could* afford," Bruce put in. "Now we don't know what we can afford. I certainly don't intend to saddle myself with a piece of property at this stage of the game."

"What will we do, then?" Ellen asked.

"We can get plenty of nice apartments for thirty or thirty-five a month," he told her.

"What will we furnish such an apartment with?" she asked in return. "We were going to use a lot of this old stuff here. It wouldn't do in such a flat as that. And we can't save enough in three months to buy an outfit of furniture."

Bruce had not intended to suggest what he now suggested; he had not dreamed that he would want to suggest it; had not allowed himself to think so. But marriage in three months!

"Do we really have to get married in August?" he suddenly blurted out.

He wished he had not said it. The wound he had given her was too obvious. It was a moment before the girl could control her voice.

"Why—not if you—don't want to, Bruce," she answered tremulously.

"Of course I want to," he hurriedly corrected. Yet, having said it, he could hardly yield the advantage he might press. "It isn't what we want, but what may be best for us. If we get married in August it will end all prospect of saving any money, whether we rent or pay for a place or whatever we do. And I've just realized what a man may do if he has a little ready money.

"Down there at Mercer's club there was a fellow who's managing a branch brokerage office. He put Mercer next to Amalgamated Zinc. Mercer had a little money to put down. And he cleaned up two thousand dollars.

"Now, if we just waited a little while, until I could rake together a hundred or two—Mr. Wheelock promised to put me next to something like that when he knows of it. What good would it do, if I had no money, or all I had in a shack on a chicken-yard? Wouldn't it be better if—"

He broke off. He was not making a hit with his proposition.

"What's the matter? Don't you really think so?" he urged.

"Oh, I suppose so," Ellen answered wearily. "I don't want to stand in your way, Bruce. I—I've an awful headache to-night. I really can't think. I—you'll excuse me, won't you, Bruce?"

She rose and hurried from the room.

Bruce got up, stepped toward the dining-room, saw her mother sitting there, heard Ellen close the door of her tiny sleeping-room beyond. He hesitated.

What could he do? He turned softly, seeing that Mrs. Randolph was dozing, found his hat in the hall, and made his way down the four flights of stairs.

He wondered if he had been a brute. Of course he would have to come back to-morrow and tell her that he had changed his mind, that he wanted to be married to her more than he wanted all the money in the world. Of course they would take the little place. Of course—and he would always stay a drudge.

Ellen had the right to say. Five years of patient waiting, in which he knew she had turned away one admiring suitor with better prospects than his—five years had given her the right. But—

"Damn it all," he growled miserably, "why can't she be a little bit reasonable?"

CHAPTER VI.

REAL MONEY.

HE did go back on Wednesday evening, though a wakeful night made him wish rather to retire early.

"Well, girly," he spoke cheerfully—the more cheerfully at sight of doubt in her

eyes—"we may be able to marry in August after all. Wheelock and I had a little confab this afternoon. I can't say anything just yet; but there's a chance of my getting a little money on the side which would help some."

Underneath his cheerfulness was a sense of misgiving. What Wheelock had offered seemed a little too much. The cashier had taken him to lunch. They had gone to a very quiet café and taken a table with high backs to the seats like a Pullman section. Wheelock had spread a newspaper before him.

"See this?" he had asked, pointing to the page of stock quotations. "See what's happening to Tubular Brass preferred? Ten points in two days! Lordy! I'll have the price of a summer at Newport out of it anyhow."

Bruce looked interested; tried to look intelligent. His knowledge of stocks was gleaned from old numbers of magazines which certainly had not encouraged having much to do with them.

"Evans," Wheelock said next, "you ought to be in on this. Let's see. I don't know as I could do anything to-day. But this will go on for another couple of weeks. From what I hear, Tubular Brass is headed straight for par. Want to take a chance?"

Evans was almost frightened at the thought. To win a hundred dollars, or two hundred possibly, would be such good fortune as would almost sweep him off his feet. But, if Wheelock were to loan him a hundred dollars and he were to lose—

"How'd I ever pay you back if I lost?" he put the objection.

"You won't be the only one in a hell of a fix if you lose," Wheelock said with a laugh. "Only, there isn't a chance to lose. These war babies have made stock-playing such as never happened before."

"Of course I don't know anything about them," Bruce said. "I've never had money enough to invest in anything."

"You will, if I can raise a little extra to put you in on this," promised the cashier.

Already had begun Bruce's lessons in the duties of his new job behind the paying-teller's windows. Already his speedy advancement had been accepted as a day's wonder by his fellows. He could endure the fact that some of them who had treated him with least respect before were obviously now envious. Others were showing a friendly interest hitherto unknown to the worst drudge in their office.

Already the promotion had lost that part of its glamour which put it among things too good to be true. He had accepted it; come to figure on the ways of spending the big increase in his income; begun to realize how very little difference it could make in his life.

But promoting him cost Wheelock nothing. The question now arose as to why Wheelock should wish to loan him money out of personal funds. Evans had been trying to puzzle it out all afternoon.

He told himself that it was but plain common sense to let worry alone. Every reason, however, had been given to believe Wheelock's motives were not unselfish. The utter change had been wrought by his charge that Mercer's place was due to favoritism on account of his uncle's very large deposits and stock in the bank.

It was conceivable that Wheelock and Mercer should not wish such a charge to be circulated about the institution, still more that they should wish to keep it from being spread outside. It was conceivable that they should believe him the only one who suspected its truth.

Now that the utter novelty of such treatment had faded a little, he found it not wholly unthinkable that their wish should cause some effort to make friends of him.

But to lend him money for a gamble on stocks, with the knowledge that he could not return it in case of loss—the effect was too big for the cause!

Could it be—no, he would not allow himself to think that there was something Wheelock and Mercer feared worse to

have exposed than favoritism. Besides, while memory of his own exact words had been lost in the whirl of their amazing results, he had mentioned only the name of Josiah Wilbridge.

If there had been any dishonesty affecting Wilbridge's account, he had not discovered it. And he had the W to Z books even yet.

Once during the afternoon he had turned to Wilbridge's pages in the ledgers. He had quickly turned away from them. He told himself that he had no time or business away from the immediate work of the day. He had plunged into this with a nervous energy which seemed to characterize men like Mercer and Wheelock and such of their friends as he had met.

As luck would have it, Wheelock had wanted Meyer in his office for half an hour before closing time. Bruce had been sent in to take the assistant teller's place. Of course that meant that most of the depositors turned to the window of Johns, the teller, as soon as they saw that the new man in the other window had to refer to his superior for the identifications.

But it had provided a foretaste of the sense of having the new job that awaited him.

Of all his misgivings and questions he had nothing to say to Ellen. Somehow they soon drifted away from talk of their marriage. Somehow he did not try to drift back to the subject. Their conversation seemed to lack a little of the spontaneity attained through their long courtship and engagement.

He went home early. He felt depressed. He went to sleep with a resolve to make sure about Wilbridge's account the first thing in the morning—a resolve with enough string to it so that he might not carry it out.

The depression was still on in the morning. He renewed his resolution to learn the truth at whatever cost to his bright new prospects. He got down to the bank a few minutes early, but not enough to arouse any suspicion of untoward curiosity.

"Hello, Evans; come in here a moment," Wheelock called to him the instant he had opened the office door.

Bruce once more followed the cashier inside. Once more Wheelock took pains to close the door.

"Don't want everybody to know your business," he said with a smile for his precaution. "Now, I've got things fixed to put you next to our little war baby. I got another hot tip on Tubular Brass last night. It will go away beyond par. There's a real order placed, and the big fellows are going to try to hog it all. You'll see some fun before the day is over.

"Now, Meyer won't be in for fifteen or twenty minutes. I've just drawn this check to cash. You cash it and put the money in your pocket without any racket about it.

"Bennet is the devil about any speculating. His idea seems to be that is exclusively for directors and their president.

"As soon as Meyer comes in you come to me. I'll send you out on an errand for me; see? You hustle right down to Kent's, in Thirty-Third Street. Ask for Mr. Chase.

"I've fixed it up about you already. He'll let you have a hundred shares of Tubular Brass for this. Don't hang around the place, but hustle right back here. Understand now?"

"I understand, but—"

Bruce wished he had had time to look through Wilbridge's account. Suppose he discovered crooked work—he would be under such obligation as would close his mouth.

"Never mind that; just do what I tell you. I can stand it—so long as Tubular Brass keeps on going up."

Bruce took the check. A gasp escaped his lips.

"Why, Mr. Wheelock, I—"

"Hurry up. You won't have time to straighten out your cash before opening," Wheelock bade him, waving him away.

Bruce made his way to the paying-

teller's cage. Nothing that had happened yet had so dazed him as this. He gave the bit of paper a second furtive glance.

He had not been mistaken. The check was for twelve hundred dollars.

Actually its bigness sickened him. Beads of perspiration stood upon his forehead. He wanted to get away from the thing.

He could hardly keep from hurrying back to Wheelock and telling him that he couldn't possibly accept such a responsibility.

Twelve hundred dollars! Why, it was more than his whole year's salary. Suppose he should lose it. Suppose the gamble Wheelock ordered went wrong.

And what in the world did it mean? Twelve hundred dollars! Why did Wheelock want to do him a favor of such magnitude?

Twelve hundred dollars! Why, he could buy the little place Ellen wanted for less than that. For that he could get a substantial equity in a place incomparably better than the one Ellen wanted. With that he could afford Mercer's club. With it he could buy a very excellent automobile.

But it wasn't really his. After all Wheelock was but lending it to him. Wheelock was quite sure of its return. What had been given was the profit he could make on it. Perhaps Wheelock was afraid to be personally connected with any bigger investment than he already had.

Was it possible that Jessie Wheelock had had something to do with this? He dared not think it. And yet—

Oh, well, it wasn't as if the money were given him. He would realize a hundred or two, of course. Having thought of what the money would do, the recollection that he could do nothing with it, could have only its profits on a deal, caused a shrinkage in his wonder over the thing.

He was glad, though, that he had covered up the check with a couple of others on the file when Meyer came in. Somehow he felt furtive about the transaction. He could not quite persuade himself that there was nothing worse about it than the violation of one of the rules.

"Mr. Wheelock," he said to the cashier the moment Wheelock had called him in for the purpose of "sending him on an errand," "I can't take such a lot of money as this. Why, if I were to lose it—"

"I wouldn't risk the expense of suing you for it, Evans," the cashier responded with a chuckle. "So you can let me do the worrying about that. You hustle down to Kent's as fast as you can. Every minute is worth a dollar or two to you."

And Bruce went. At the address on Thirty-Third Street he found an excited gathering of men, a vast wall-full of unintelligible numbers with meaningless letters at the top of them.

He recognized the stout young man Mercer had pointed out at the club. Chase was sitting at a desk at one side of the front of the room.

"Oh, you're Mr. Wheelock's friend," the manager greeted him after hearing his name and giving a glance of surprise at his shabby appearance. "He told me about you. What can we do for you?"

Chase's manner was reassuringly friendly. It did not quite cure Evans of the fear in his heart. That fear had been emphasized as he walked through the streets with the unaccustomed money in his pocket.

Kent's manager would have been still more reassuring if he had not spoken in a tone evidently softened to prevent his words being overheard.

"It—it's Tubular Brass," Bruce stammered the name of the stock.

"Well, Tubular Brass is the busy little baby to-day. How much will you have? Want to buy it outright or have it on margins?"

"I've twelve hundred here. Can I get a hundred shares at that?"

"Yes. I could let you have a hundred and ten right now. Want them?"

Bruce nodded. Speech was hard for him. He had never been so nervously upset in his life.

"Buy a hundred Tubular Brass," Chase called to some one across the room. A young man spoke into a telephone. "Let's see, Mr. Evans—your other name is?"

"Bruce," Evans answered thickly.

"Charley, tell Bailey to put in another buy of ten when he gets a chance," Chase spoke again to the young man at the telephone.

"All right, Mr. Evans. Hope you make half a million," Chase spoke in dismissal.

"Bought the hundred," the young man called from his phone.

Several men eyed Bruce as he turned away from the desk. They looked down at a strip of ribbon which was issuing from beneath a glass dome with clockwork buzzing inside it. Bruce remembered seeing Mercer examine such a ribbon in such an instrument upon entering his club. Wheelock had done the same at the café. He decided to do as the rest.

He wondered why the men looked at him so searchingly; what he was doing that seemed unusual. Then he decided that his clothes must be the object of their curiosity. Yet two or three other men, older than he, were even shabbier. He looked at the tape.

100 TUB BRS 43½.

It was his purchase. It was a wonderful thing that something he had done was heralded all over the world. He wondered whether that same little set of abbreviations and figures were actually cabled to Europe. He had bought a hundred shares of stock, and the world took notice!

Well, he had spent twelve hundred dollars in one lump. If the world ever would notice him, now was the time for it.

But forty-three and a half—unless he was mistaken the figures at which Wheelock had pointed yesterday noon had been forty-seven and something. Wheelock had thought he could get a hundred. He got a hundred and ten. Obviously he had secured a bargain.

He started back for the bank. There seemed something awful about leaving all that money without any one to watch it, to see that it did not suffer some sudden loss which would wipe it out of existence before he could even find out that it was gone. He could not work.

He could hardly understand how the others worked. He had twelve hundred in Tubular Brass, whatever that might be. The fact was so oppressively big, so exclusively preoccupying, it seemed it must shriek itself through the building.

Suppose he lost it. Wheelock said he would never sue to recover it. Of course not. But it would be a debt. Bruce always paid his debts.

If he lost—somehow he suddenly found the prospect of putting off his marriage indefinitely a very sad one.

Suppose he won. Wheelock said the stock would go over par. He tried to figure out what it meant, how much he would make. But he couldn't.

He looked at the clock. Eleven. Another hour to lunch-time. No—he must wait until Travis got back. An hour and a half. Could he live through it? He wanted nothing but to get to a ticker.

Twelve o'clock came. Travis hurried out. Evans gasped. He was hours behind in his work. He tried to plunge into the ledgers. A call from the paying-teller's telephone startled him out of an effort to figure how low Tubular Brass would have to go to wipe out the twelve hundred entirely.

It took him five minutes to get the answer to the question as to the state of Mr. Antonio Zallina's account. Travis came back. Bruce straightened himself. His limbs seemed numb and cold. He was going to find out—find out—great Heaven!

"Stock Ticker," a little sign announced in front of the corner café. Bruce drew a long breath and entered the place. He looked about fearfully. The little glass dome buzzed merrily in a corner. He drew another breath.

Two men hurried into the place and made for the ticker. He drew aside and let them beat him to it. His eagerness to know seemed to have petered out.

"She seems to be steadied," one of them said to the other.

"Um-m-m," the other agreed. "I'm not sorry I got out, though."

"I'd let a shake of the bones decide what I'm to do," the first spoke dubiously.

They went away. Bruce stepped up to the instrument. Hastily he ran down the strip of paper as the others had done. While he was at it the machine commenced to buzz again. He watched the line coming from it. With a sickening giddiness he saw the letters "TUB BRS."

Would they never give the figures? The number of the shares sold was a thousand. Somebody was selling big. That meant— "4-3-⅝."

Evans went out and walked two miles. Then he got back to the bank. He spent the afternoon trying to recall all he had ever read of stock transactions. A sale of a thousand shares—a big sale—why, that must be some one trying to break the market! Bear—that was the word.

But it would break him. He stared toward Wheelock's door again and again. Ought he to go to the cashier for advice? Did Wheelock know that they were trying to break Tubular Brass?

"Say, Evans." Mercer was speaking in his nicest tone. "I hate to ask it of you, old man, but would you mind checking up with Adams? I was going to do it myself, and I've told all the others they could go. But my wife just called up and says the kid's sick. Guess it's nothing serious. You know how the women are about such things. She wants me right off. You don't mind, do you?"

Asked in such wise, Bruce could hardly refuse. He could not explain to the head bookkeeper that he was on the verge of nervous prostration over Tubular Brass.

"Certainly not," he tried to say genially, though he had to moisten his lips with his tongue to do it.

"Want to run the machine or read the checks?" asked Adams.

"I'll read," Bruce answered.

His choice was due to the Wheelock check. Somehow he could not get over the feeling that no more should be known about it than necessary. He could hardly have been sure of working the adding-machine anyhow.

The other men were leaving as they began. Several times Bruce looked up at the sound of a latch. He thought Wheelock would be in to say something to him.

They began on the checks for the clearing-house, those on outside banks. These were soon finished. The bulk of the checks were on the trust company.

"One hundred"—"one hundred"—"t w e l ve fifty"—"twelve fifty"—"thirty"—"thirty." Back and forth their voices echoed the amounts of the checks in monotone with the swift clack of the adder as accompaniment.

Rapidly the stacks diminished on one hand and piled up on the other. Bruce began a fresh pile. It was Meyer's; Bruce knew, because there was a tiny chip on Meyer's stamp which broke the "s" in "cash."

He sighed. It was silly for him to feel this fear of Wheelock's check. He could not help it to save his life.

Thinner and thinner grew the pile. The edges of six checks showed—five—four—three.

Bruce stared. He himself had taken in two checks beside Wheelock's. First on the file, they were at the bottom. But this third check was not one of them.

"Yes, two hundred and seventy-two fifty," Adams repeated for the second time.

"Forty dollars," Bruce said hastily. It was the last check he had cashed. The next for six fifty, was the one he had put on top of Wheelock's. He remembered the man who cared so little about the work of bank clerks that he came for cash every day. And—now it was the last of the pile.

Wheelock's check for twelve hundred dollars was not there!

(To Be Continued.)

A Christmas Menace

by Helen A. Holden

I.

IT had rained steadily all day.

A limousine crawled slowly along the slippery asphalt. At a cross street it came to a stop while the traffic passed.

"Rot and nonsense!" exclaimed a man hunched up in a corner of the car.

The girl in the opposite corner said nothing, but she glanced into the rain-soaked street and thought how misty and unreal the people looked—like shadows a bit darker than the general gloom.

In front of the railroad station the car stopped. A porter immediately opened the door and silently and rapidly gathered together the suit-cases, wraps, and umbrellas.

As the man jerked himself from the luxurious corner of the limousine he repeated fiercely:

"Rot and nonsense!"

The girl followed. She shook herself as if banishing the gloom enveloping them as the storm enveloped the city.

She turned suddenly and came back to the car.

"It doesn't look much like it now, but I hope you'll have a very, very merry Christmas, Willard," she smiled encouragingly to the chauffeur.

"Thank you, Miss Jackman," and the fellow touched his hat. "The same to you."

"Just like Willard to get us down here hours before train-time," grumbled the man as he followed the porter.

"Two-ten, sir?" asked the porter. "She's all made up and ready to start."

"Trust Willard for getting us here at the last minute," muttered the man, determined not to be pleased, as the porter led the way to the train.

"Put us in a sleeper, did they?" he continued. "Well, I won't stand it. A sleeper in the daytime is an abomination. If there isn't a parlor-car on I'm not going a step farther."

"Oh, father!" protested the girl in sudden alarm.

"I mean it." His tone was convincing. "Get us seats in the parlor-car, or a stateroom, anything—otherwise the train goes without us."

"If you can manage it," Miss Jackman raised her eyes beseechingly to the porter; "it is quite important that we make this trip."

"No chance for a stateroom, and with this big holiday crowd there ain't much chance for anything different. But I'll see what can be done," and the porter hurried off.

Fortunately two people were found who were willing to exchange their chair-seats for the sleeper.

As the car pulled out, Joyce Jackman settled back with a sigh of relief. The journey had really begun.

"Not much of an improvement over the sleeper," her father's voice broke the silence. "Why can't people dry off before getting in. It smells like a zoo."

Joyce did not reply, for it really didn't matter. Nothing mattered now. They had started, and nothing could stop them.

She shut her eyes. She wanted to shut out everything except the almost unbelievable thought that kept time with the throb of the wheels.

"Father and I—are going—to spend—Christmas—with Cynthia and Allen—and the others."

Cynthia was Joyce's sister. She had married and moved West before *it* had happened.

Joyce had been very young at the time—too young to realize the nature of the catastrophe. She only knew that everything had been changed.

The telephones all over the house had been taken out. Now there was only one in the little den at the end of the hall down-stairs.

In the old days one of the bells—the busiest bells in the world—was always calling her father. Now the one bell seemed to sulk in its lonely state, remaining silent for days at a time.

At last Cynthia had moved East again. She made a flying visit to her home. Joyce still held her breath over that memory. Cynthia had treated her father as Joyce had never seen him treated before. She had thrown her arms around his neck and kissed him.

Joyce had watched in fear and trembling. When nothing serious happened she sighed with quick relief.

Then to Joyce's complete bewilderment Cynthia had exacted a promise from her father. It was to spend the Christmas holidays with them at their camp in the Adirondacks.

Cynthia had flitted into the big gloomy house and out again like a sudden ray of sunlight on a colorless, cloudy day.

After she was gone Joyce often wondered if it were not all a dream. But now at last the swaying of the car, the dull hum of the wheels, and the whistle of the engine were convincing proofs.

The winter afternoon was short. As darkness settled down Joyce noticed with a thrill of pleasure that the rain had turned to snow. That meant that there would be sleighing, snow-shoeing, and—

"First call for dinner."

Brought back suddenly to the present, Joyce looked inquiringly at her father.

"You don't expect me to eat at this time in the afternoon, do you?" he growled.

"I know it's disgracefully early," agreed Joyce, "but you see we change cars at 6.45 and there may not be any diner on the other train. It's only a branch road, you know."

"I don't know, and don't want to know." Her father's tone was conclusive. "What I do know is that I'm not going to eat at six o'clock."

Nothing more was said until at 6.45 the junction was reached.

"My, it looks Christmassy," beamed Joyce as the porter helped her across the station platform to the waiting train.

"Looks like a blizzard," muttered Dr. Jackman. "It's all rot—"

"We'd prefer seats in the parlor-car, please," broke in Joyce hurriedly. "My father doesn't like the sleeper."

"Ain't nothin' but day coaches on this road," replied the porter; "but if you each take a seat it's fairly comfortable."

Joyce waited nervously for something to happen. But instead of the expected outburst her father let the porter arrange him and his belongings as comfortably as the narrow space allowed.

As Joyce in her turn was being established in the seat in front, her father inquired sarcastically:

"I presume the people who travel on this road dine at home?"

"There ain't no diner, sir," replied the porter, "but you can get sandwiches and fruit."

"Oh, sandwiches will taste good," said Joyce quickly. "Please send us a dozen."

"Er—er—all the same kind, miss?" asked the porter.

"Let me see," replied Joyce; "you might send three chopped olives, three lettuce, three cheese, and three—three—"

"They only have chicken and ham," grinned the man.

"Chicken, then," said Joyce. "I suppose chicken would be more substantial anyway."

A few minutes later a boy began filling the seat at her side with square waxed-paper packages.

"Wha — wha — what's this?" she gasped.

"Ain't you the lady what ordered sandwiches?" inquired the boy.

"But only a dozen," replied Joyce.

"Nine, ten, eleven, twelve," counted the boy. "Two-forty."

"I didn't know you used a whole loaf to each sandwich," said Joyce as she paid him. "I've always seen the loaves cut in slices. But it's all right," she added hastily for fear of hurting the boy's feelings, "for I'm very hungry."

The train started. Joyce picked up one of the packages and unwrapped it.

"I never met a railroad sandwich before," she murmured as she regarded it curiously. "It doesn't look like even a distant relation to the familiar afternoon-tea affair. I wonder they can both be called by the same family name."

She bit into it. She tried each of the four sides in succession. She glanced speculatively in the direction of the other eleven scattered over the seat at her side.

"Will you have one?" she turned to her father.

"I don't see any comfort in a cold sandwich on a night like this." Dr. Jackman's voice was as chilly as the darkness outside.

"I'm not looking for comfort, I'm looking for chicken," muttered Joyce as she took another bite through the thick, dry pieces of bread.

The train was slowing down. It stopped, and people began getting in.

"Oh, dear," thought Joyce, "I do hope no one will try to crowd in with father."

She scrambled the sandwiches into her lap and smiled encouragingly at the passengers as they passed along the aisle.

The train started again, and Joyce settled back with a thankful sigh. The newcomers had mysteriously disappeared into places somewhere in the rear.

Joyce unloaded the sandwiches from her lap. She arranged them on the seat at her side in three neat piles. She had scarcely accomplished this when the train slowed down for another stop.

"Oh, dear," and Joyce again swept the heaps into her lap.

From that time on things moved so rapidly they left only a confused impression on her mind.

She remembered heading off a woman and child. They seemed determined to crowd in with her father. She used the sandwiches as bait. But it had been a jump from the frying-pan into the fire.

A woman with children—they seemed as numerous as the sandwiches—pushed and shoved and wedged herself, themselves, into, on and around her father. Scarcely an inch of his luxurious fur-coat remained visible.

Too many to cope with, Joyce could only look on with terrified eyes. Something would surely happen. It did.

As they stood on the station platform Joyce was thankful for the cool night air as it fanned her hot cheeks.

How she had grabbed together her belongings and followed her father from the train she never knew. He was still furiously angry. Joyce caught explosive fragments of speech as he stormed up and down the narrow path that had been shoveled along the platform.

At last he entered the little wooden building that did duty as a station.

Joyce moved up quickly and listened from the doorway.

"When is the next train back to the junction?" Dr. Jackman spoke with an indignant gasp.

"4.40 A.M." The man at the ticket-window eyed the strangers curiously.

"Where can I get a rig to take me to a hotel?" he next demanded.

"There ain't no hotel nearer 'n Coatesville, next place up the road," said the man; "but you'll find that an A No. 1 hotel—none better 'n it this side Phoenix. And Coatesville's got more to see in the way of interest to strangers."

"I don't want to see Coatesville or Phoenix, or any other fool town around here," broke in Dr. Jackman hotly. "I only want a place to stay till the first train back to the city."

Joyce stifled a cry. Go back to the big lonely brownstone house — give up her dear Christmas—her dreams—

"I wonder if I can stand it." She pressed her hand tightly against her heart to stop the hurt. It was growing bigger and bigger with the pain. Perhaps in time it would break.

But it didn't, and after a while she found herself listening again.

The man at the ticket-window was phoning.

"Get around to the station as soon as you can. To the Continental at Coatesville—yes, two passengers."

As the man hung up the receiver Dr. Jackman handed him a piece of paper on which he had been writing.

"I want this telegram sent."

The man read aloud: "Delayed by storm. Will return home."

Joyce did not stop to hear more. She felt her way blindly along the station platform. Her eyes were burning with hot tears.

"I'm acting like a baby," and she wiped her eyes impatiently.

It had stopped snowing. In the clear atmosphere the stars sparkled brilliantly.

Did one star outshine the others?

"On earth peace—"

Joyce looked at the countryside all purely white in its new snow dress.

"Good will toward men."

"I hope the little rascals are enjoying the sandwiches," and Joyce gave a tremulous laugh.

II.

"It's no use!" said the driver.

"Do you expect to leave us here in the middle of the road for the rest of the night?" demanded Dr. Jackman.

"It's the drifts," explained the driver; "we never can get through to Coatesville to-night."

"I'll give you double the price you asked," said Dr. Jackman.

"I'd like to, all right, but it's a bigger risk than I'm willing to take," replied the driver. "'Twould be just shoveling out of one drift and into another. You wouldn't care about the trip lasting a couple of days, I reckon?"

"A town without a hotel and no way of getting to one ought to be wiped out of existence." Dr. Jackman's voice sounded as if he meant to perform the deed at his earliest convenience.

Silence followed, broken by the doctor's: "Well!"

"I wonder if the people in that cottage would take us in, just for the night." Joyce motioned toward a small house whose light twinkled hospitably. "We simply can't stay here or we'd freeze to death."

"By all means ask them. The people of this region are not slow at finding excuses." Dr. Jackman glared fiercely at the driver.

Before the latter could reply, Joyce broke in: "Even if they refuse we won't be any worse off than we are now."

She started to get out of the sleigh but the driver stopped her.

"The snow that's drifted into the road ahead has blown off Widow Mullens's yard. I think I can drive right up to the kitchen."

The sleigh stopped not far from the door. As the bells on the horses ceased their merry jingle the door flew open and a child's voice cried:

"It's Santy, it's Santy!" and a boy peered joyously out into the night.

"No 'tain't," an older girl appeared quickly at the boy's side, "he always comes down the chimbly."

Joyce stood spellbound on the top step of Widow Mullens's cottage. Was this a real flesh and blood boy, she wondered, or was it some Christmas sprite in a disguised palace?

The boy's hair was black, soft and wavy. His eyes, big, wide open, and Irish-blue, were shaded by black lashes. His features were small and regular.

He moved back to let her enter. The prince disappeared, and in his place stood a sad, misshapen little cripple.

A cry of pity escaped Joyce.

"Did you get hurt?" asked the boy.

"Yes, here," and she pressed her hand against her heart.

Then turning to the girl she explained:

"We can't go on on account of the snow and would like to spend the night here. Will you ask your mother if she will take us in?"

"Ma's at Greens' 'cause the baby's sick. She said if the baby or the weather got worse she wouldn't be home till late. But you can stay, 'cause we had the agent all last summer, and ma was sorry when he left."

Joyce stepped back to the door and called to her father:

"It's all right, so please have the suit-cases and things brought in."

The driver was dismissed with instructions to call for them in time for an early train the next morning.

"What is your name?" Joyce asked.

The boy was looking at her father with great wide-open, inquiring eyes. She could not bear—she must prevent her father from hurting the little fellow by speaking in his usual gruff manner.

"Larry, and mine's Mary," replied the girl.

Larry said nothing. He was shuffling with his poor little crooked legs across the floor. Nearer, and nearer, and nearer he came to her father.

Joyce held her breath. He was such a little fellow, and a cripple.

"Mary says you ain't cause you didn't come down the chimbly. But I know you, Mr. Santa Claus."

Joyce still held her breath. Her father said nothing.

"You see, you can't fool me," Larry shook his black curly head, "for I see your reindeer coat—even if it is on wrong side out."

He reached up and took Dr. Jackman's hand in a confiding clasp.

Joyce began to breathe in quick gasps. Still her father said nothing.

"You'll stay a while, won't you?" The boy led the doctor to a chair, and when he had sat down he leaned trustingly against his knee. "Ma said you wouldn't come this year cause pa's gone way off to fight. I'd go, too, if—if—if I was like other boys."

The doctor made a sudden move. Joyce stepped quickly forward.

But instead of the expected impatient gesture the big man with the strong arms leaned over and gathered the child to him as gently as a mother might.

The little lad nestled down as confidently as if the gentle smile on the stern man's face was quite natural there.

III.

THE evening that followed was one of wonder and amazement to Joyce. It seemed as if more joy was crowded into it than into all her life before.

Of course there was no tree, but no one seemed to mind. Dr. Jackman called for stockings, and insisted on Larry's bringing two because they were so small.

"But, father, how are we going to fill them?" asked Joyce in a troubled whisper.

"With the junk you've collected for Cynthia and Allen. You didn't pack it in your trunk, did you?" demanded the doctor anxiously.

"Oh, no. That is, most of it's here in my suit-case for I was afraid the trunks might not arrive in time."

"Then everything's all right," spoke the doctor in a relieved voice.

"But I'm afraid they're hardly suitable. That is I never would have brought —for instance the wrist-watch for Cynthia would look out of place on Mary."

"It doesn't matter what it is as long as there are packages to undo and surprises at the end."

The doctor had accepted the rôle of Santa Claus. With all the strength of a strong man he was living up to it.

In the midst of the busy preparations Mrs. Mullens arrived.

After explanations had been made, she quickly offered the hospitality of her tiny cottage.

"And now," said Dr. Jackman after the excited children had at last been put to bed, "I want to ask you to let me take Larry home with me when I go back to-morrow morning."

Mrs. Mullens uttered a startled exclamation.

"I'm a doctor," he continued, "though I have not been practising for the last nine years. But that is beside the question. The important thing is that I feel certain Larry can be cured. Do you realize what that means—to run about like other boys? Let me have him for a year and I promise you will not regret it."

Tears filled Mrs. Mullens's eyes. What a Christmas present it would be! Good, straight legs for Larry instead of his poor, weak, wobbly ones. She had thought only God could do that, but this man said it was not necessary to wait—

A sob choked her voice as she gave her boy into the keeping of this stranger.

"Understand I don't promise that Larry will be cured, though I hope so. But I can and do promise that he will be better, much better."

Her father's voice so deep yet gentle brought to Joyce shadowy memories of days long past.

After plans had been discussed and everything arranged, Mrs. Mullens led Joyce to the plain but neat little bedroom she was to occupy. Then she returned to the kitchen to show Dr. Jackman into the parlor, for she had made up the sofa there for him. The best in the house was not good enough for the man who was to cure her Larry.

She picked up his suit-case. It slipped from her hand and dropped to the floor with a heavy thud.

"Here, here"—Dr. Jackman turned quickly at the sound—"that's too heavy for you. Let me carry it."

"It wasn't the heft," replied Mrs. Mullens, "I just of a sudden felt weak like."

"Too much excitement for one night," commented the doctor. "We must hurry or it will be time to get up before we have gone to bed."

At last the house was dark and silent. It lay like a shadow on the whiteness of the snow outside.

Suddenly and almost stealthily a tiny light appeared. It moved slowly and cautiously along till it reached the place where Larry was sleeping.

"Larry, Larry, wake up, darling," whispered his mother as she shook him gently.

Larry came back to consciousness slowly. Half awake, he muttered:

"And Santa Claus said 'All good boys are tight asleep. If Larry is awake I won't leave him anything,'" and Larry shut his eyes tight.

"Larry, Larry." The terror of his mother's voice conveyed itself even to the boy's unconsciousness.

"I thought you was Santa Claus; is it all a dream?" he questioned in a troubled voice.

"Larry, you must get dressed and come with me. Don't make a sound." Mrs. Mullens looked around in sudden alarm. "But, oh, Larry, hurry, hurry."

"Mother, Santa Claus won't come while we're awake," protested the little fellow loudly.

"Hush!" Mrs. Mullens put a quick hand over his mouth and waited, listening anxiously.

No alarming sound interrupted the quiet of the night.

"We must hurry, Larry, or some one —not Santa Claus—but big and bad and cruel will get us," she whispered in a voice that made the boy shiver.

At last, really frightened, Larry's clumsy fingers helped his mother's trembling ones as she hurried him into his clothes.

Then came his hat and coat and mittens. His mother made him go as far as the kitchen door in his stocking feet. There she pinned a shawl over her head, and putting on Larry's shoes, they started out.

The wind swept the door out of her hand. It banged shut with a noise that echoed through the silent night like thunder.

They did not wait to learn whether any one else heard it. Mrs. Mullens grabbed Larry up. Terror lending her strength, she started off over the slippery path that had been shoveled for her earlier that evening.

At last exhausted she was forced to put Larry down. Then slipping, sliding, and often falling, they continued along the narrow way.

It was only a short distance to the Greens', but to Mrs. Mullens and Larry that night it was the longest journey of their lives.

In places the wind had drifted the snow across the path till it was nearly impassable.

At last the house stood grim and silent before them. With renewed strength Mrs. Mullens rapped loudly on the door.

It seemed hours before a head appeared at the window.

"Why, bless my heart if it ain't Mrs. Mullens and — woman alive, you ain't lugged Larry out a night like this—whatever—"

"Hush, hush," and Mrs. Mullens looked back with quick alarm in the direction of her own house, "but hurry. Oh, won't you be quick?" she begged.

The head disappeared and soon the door was thrown open to the two shivering figures.

When the kitchen fire had been started the Green family sat around in various hastily grabbed-up coverings to hear Mrs. Mullens's tale.

She explained everything from finding the strangers on her return to their retiring to rest.

"And who do you think he is — the man who wants to take my Larry with him to the city?" she demanded fiercely as she ended her story.

The Green family shook their heads in breathless silence.

"The devil himself — Dr. Richard Jackman."

"Never heard the devil's other name before," replied Mr. Green.

"He's as nice appearing gentleman as ever you met," continued Mrs. Mullens. "I never suspected who he was till I picked up his suit-case to take into the parlor where he was to sleep. There it was in big black letters — Dr. Richard Jackman."

"But who is Dr. Richard Jackman?" asked Mr. Green curiously.

"I remember something about him," said Mrs. Green; "he was the biggest doctor in the city till he let a baby die."

"He didn't let the poor lamb die," broke in Mrs. Mullens wrathfully. "He killed it, he did. That's what the papers said—and it was just plain murder—and you'd never think it to look at him—and his daughter the gentlest creature you ever saw—a wolf in sheep's clothing that's what he is—and I want you to keep Larry till after they're gone."

"You better stay, too," urged Mrs. Green hospitably.

"And Mary over there alone?" demanded Mrs. Mullens. "I oughtn't to have left her this long, for goodness only knows what arts he may be practising this very minute."

With this sudden, terrifying thought Mrs. Mullen's hurried off.

Again urged by fear she stumbled and slipped over the snowy path back to the

little cottage lying peaceful and still in the soft light of the twinkling Christmas stars.

These slowly faded as the sun came up. The ground shone dazzlingly white in its fresh holiday attire.

The Mullens household was not early astir. The snow-plow had been busy on the road long before the house showed signs of life.

"It's Christmas," was Joyce's first waking thought, "and although we can't spend it with Cynthia and Allen, yet it's going to be a really, truly Christmas with children and stockings. I wonder—it must be late—why don't I hear Mary and Larry?" She lay still, listening.

"Of course, Mrs. Mullens is keeping them still for fear of disturbing us. I must hurry down so we can begin festivities at once or there won't be time before we leave."

She scrambled into her clothes and quickly opened her bedroom door.

She paused, listening eagerly. The house was as still as a desert. She ran lightly down the stairs.

"Merry Christmas!" she called as she caught sight of Mrs. Mullens bending over the kitchen stove.

The woman did not turn. She muttered something unintelligible.

"Where are the children? Aren't they up yet?" Joyce paused, uncertainly, fearing she knew not what.

"Mary's got a cold and I'm not letting her get up." Mrs. Mullens still bent over the stove.

"Oh, I'm so sorry," said Joyce, "and —and—Larry?"

"Larry's gone off on a visit." Mrs. Mullens bent still lower over her work.

What could the woman mean? Joyce was conscious of something slipping from her. It was always that way. Before she could grasp any happiness, it always vanished.

Since her father's interest in Larry the night before she had pictured a future so different from the past. The silent, gloomy house would waken from its sleep through the warmth and sunshine of a child's merry laugh.

Larry, Larry! It all depended on Larry—her father's future—her future —the future of the gloomy old dwelling.

"Mrs. Mullens," fear tugged at her heart, and trembled in her voice, "what do you mean. Where is Larry?"

But Mrs. Mullens's explanations were incoherent. Joyce felt as if she were batting hopelessly against a stone wall.

At last her father appeared. He took the news quietly, expressed no surprise, and waited anxiously for the arrival of the sleigh to take them to the station.

Joyce felt dazed. Her thoughts circled around and around. She felt that if something did not interrupt she would spend the rest of her days on the same endless chain.

Christmas morning—the stockings still hung — no one to empty them — Mary sick and Larry gone—the house in the city gloomy and silent—Christmas morning and the stockings still hung—

It seemed like days, but it was only hours before the sleigh arrived.

Joyce was glad when at last they started. The cold air against her hot forehead was grateful. Perhaps by the time they reached the station she would be able to think straight ahead instead of in that hopeless whirl.

She wondered what time it was. What train were they taking back to town? She felt for her watch. It was gone.

"Father," she exclaimed, "I'm sorry, but we'll have to go back. My watch—I must have forgotten to put it on this morning. I can't lose it; it was mother's, you know."

So the sleigh turned around and they drove once more to the Mullens cottage.

As Joyce rapped on the door she heard shouts and laughter. She knocked again but was unheeded.

At last, despairing of making herself heard, she opened the door and entered.

She stood speechless, looking at the group around the kitchen chimney.

There were some strange children, and

Mary, and in the midst, Larry. They were all shouting with joy as Larry and Mary emptied their Christmas stockings, taking out one precious gift after another.

At Joyce's sudden appearance Mrs. Mullens started up. She sprang defiantly in front of Larry.

"You can't have him to work your devilish tricks on," she exclaimed fiercely.

"Either you have lost your mind, or I," said Joyce wearily.

"Your father's a—" Mrs. Mullens paused, for there, filling up the doorway, stood Dr. Jackman.

Joyce felt an unaccountable longing to go to her father, put her aching head on his big broad shoulder and cry. But habitual self-restraint prevented her.

Her father came quickly toward her. He took her hands in his and held them in a gentle, strong, clasp quite as comforting as crying on his shoulder.

"I probably know what you were going to call me," he said to Mrs. Mullens. "As my daughter Joyce has never heard, this is as good a time and place as any to tell her."

"You killed that baby with your two hands," Mrs. Mullens cried defiantly.

"Even the papers forbore putting it quite as forcefully as that," replied Dr. Jackman.

"Make her stop," begged Joyce. "She's lost her mind."

"How do you know what she says is not true?" Dr. Jackman turned suddenly to his daughter with the question.

"True?" repeated Joyce. "No one on earth could make me believe it."

Dr. Jackman laughed a sudden, happy, boyish laugh as he turned again to Mrs. Mullens.

"Nine years ago, as you evidently remember, the papers played me up in glaring headlines. It lasted about a week, then I passed into oblivion. As usual the papers printed half the truth without bothering about the other half."

The doctor paused a minute. Then he continued in a voice deep and convincing:

"Mrs. Mullens, no one seeing that baby could have wanted it to live. It—it—but it is too horrible to tell. Why, even its own mother shrank from it. Would you have had me prolong the life of something that would have had to be shut away in the dark? Remember it never would have lived more than a couple of years at most.

"It was a question I had to decide. And yet I did not decide the child's fate as you think. I, who had always been tireless in serving humanity any time, all times, night or day—I did nothing and the child, the thing, mercifully died."

"But father, why — why didn't you explain as you have done now?" asked Joyce.

"Why didn't they trust me?" demanded Dr. Jackman. "I had served them faithfully all my life—going without sleep or rest if any one needed me."

"It has all been such a terrible misunderstanding." Joyce shook her head sadly.

"It has been a nightmare," said Dr. Jackman, "but at last I am awake. Larry's trust last night gave me back something I lost nine years ago and, Joyce, your confidence just now completed the cure. From now on we will have faith and joy in each other, even if Mrs. Mullens and the world in general—"

He paused. Then with an irresistible smile he turned to Larry's mother:

"If you should feel like trusting us with your boy, confidence with the world at large would be established."

"She must, she must!" Joyce could not keep back the words and then her eyes ran over as she saw Mrs. Mullens lead Larry over to the doctor's arms held out for him.

"Young man, we're going where we can get some good, straight legs for you in place of these crooked ones."

"And it will be Christmas to-morrow, and the next day, and the next, and the next," beamed Joyce. "We won't have to wait for a year from to-day."

Daring the Danger Zone

by Norcross Forbes

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS ALREADY PRINTED.

WHILE traveling in Egypt, Gerard Derby receives a letter from his father, in reply to one from the son in which he has mentioned his enjoyment of the society of Gladys Hayden. The father makes it quite plain that henceforth the son must shift for himself, all that he can expect to receive being a thousand shares of the I. O. U. mining stock, one of the few bad investments the elder Derby ever made. He tells Gladys frankly his prospects, and she as frankly states that only misery, in her mind, can follow marriage with a poor man. So he sets sail for the United States, and after various vicissitudes and in spite of a warning against certain mysterious Vampas in the neighborhood, he determines to look up his I. O. U. mine for himself.

Meanwhile, Nancy Gale, whose father had left her in the hope of raising money to hold the mining claim he had staked out, is without word from him, and at last Patrick, her old man-of-all-work, goes to seek provisions. Then appears West Symmonds, of the neighboring Esperanza mine, giving her her choice of agreeing to marry him in half an hour, or of the other thing.

"West Symmonds," she answers, "I am in your power; but never while there is life in me will I be married to you of my own will."

He thereupon seizes her in his arms.

CHAPTER V.

DECIDING ON LIFE OR DEATH.

A PITEOUS shriek broke from Nancy's lips. As if sent by Providence, in answer came the thud of a heavy boot against the panel of the door. The lock did not give. An instant's delay, then a tinkle and crash of broken glass, and a man hurled himself through the window, low set to the ground.

Staggering to his feet, hands and face bloody from the cuts inflicted by the glass, the man flung himself upon Symmonds. The latter, astounded at the suddenness of the attack, bent back and fell beneath the impetus of the rush.

The stranger was lighter and smaller, and fought desperately to hold the advantage of his upper position. But weight told, and Symmonds, heaving his shoulders like great piston-rods, rolled his opponent to his side, then, heaving and tugging, gradually forced him onto his back.

Neither man said a word. Gasping, they clenched in a death embrace. No rules of fair fight prevailed. Teeth sank into flesh, and wrists wet with sweat

This story began in the November Argosy.

fought with each other to free themselves for the deadly eye gouge.

The great muscles on Symmonds's neck bulged as he bore down his weight upon his adversary. He felt the stranger grow limp in his terrific embrace, and the wild joy of victory seemed to add its power to his terrific muscles.

He freed his hand from the stranger's weakening grasp, and drew back his fist for a crashing blow which was to end the struggle.

In a moment he regretted his rashness; the limp body of his foe suddenly galvanized, his arm shot out, and the fingers closed upon Symmond's unprotected throat. He tossed his head, expecting to free himself from the grasp, but it merely increased the exquisite torture.

That grip was not an ordinary throat-hold. It was the deadly pressure of scientific jiu-jitsu, the compression of a nerve in the throat, the effect of which no scientist has ever explained.

Symmonds's head swung from side to side. His eyes bulged. Still the deadly pressure. There came a splitting rattle from his throat and he fell forward, motionless, upon the body of his conqueror.

Gerard Derby struggled to his feet. How little had he dreamed that the days of wrestling on the Japanese mail steamer would one day save his life!

Nancy rushed toward him with outstretched arms and, sobbing with joy, seized his hands.

"Thank God you came!" she cried. "A little longer and it would have been too late!"

She shuddered violently.

"Oh, thank you, thank you!" she sobbed, with the simplicity of tense emotion. Now that the danger was over, her nerves, which had faced peril undaunted, broke, and she wept unreservedly.

Derby groped for words with which to soothe her. The whole situation had arisen so suddenly that his mind was in a whirl.

Nancy suddenly noticed his forehead, cut and bleeding from the broken glass. With a little cry of pity she sprang away and ran into her room, returning in a moment with a basin of water and strips of bandages.

She led him, still dazed, to a chair, and with tender care and wonderful delicacy of touch bathed the jagged cuts.

"Don't bother!" he exclaimed, still panting violently. "The cuts do not amount to anything. But tell me," he added, indicating Symmonds's prostrate body, "what has happened? Who is this man? Why did he come here?"

Nancy rapidly and brokenly, with quick gasps between her words, related the story to him, the while her fingers still worked adjusting the bandage about his head.

As she spoke, his hands clenched with wrath.

"I wish I had killed the brute!" he ejaculated.

"Are you sure you have not?" she asked. "Look! He is motionless, and does not seem to breathe."

Gerard rose and walked across the room to where Symmonds lay. Kneeling down, he examined him carefully. He placed his ear above the unconscious man's heart. The beating, if it existed, was too faint to be detected.

"Bring me a mirror!" he demanded, looking up at Nancy.

The girl brought the glass, and Derby held it close to the pale lips. A faint cloud of moisture gathered on the clear surface.

"No, worse luck to him, he is alive," reported Derby. "Now I suppose I must play doctor and bring him back to consciousness, even if we hang him later. But first we will fix him so that he will not be such an unpleasant customer as he was. I can still feel his arms cracking my ribs. Have you any rope?"

"I will get a lariat from the corral," she answered.

When she returned with the rope Gerard proceeded to "hog-tie" his patient with more efficiency than delicacy. He slipped the gun, which Symmonds had

not had time to use, into his own belt. Then again he placed his fingers at the man's throat. Nancy gave a cry of horror:

"It would be murder!"

Gerard smiled at her.

"You do not understand," he said. "The one cure for the paralysis caused by that grip is pressure on a spot close to it. Now watch!"

His fingers closed on Symmonds's throat, then relaxed and closed again with a kneading motion. Symmonds's eyes slowly opened. His chest filled as he drew in a deep breath.

As his strength came back to him with a rush he plunged to his knees like an angry bull, till the rope about his wrists and ankles drew taut and threw him backward with a crash. Again he struggled up, and again the cutting rope held him fast.

Derby looked on unmoved, standing between him and Nancy. Realizing at last the helplessness of his position, Symmonds ceased to struggle and knelt, facing Derby, his eyes glaring like those of a wolf at bay.

"What are you going to do to me?" he snapped.

"I have not decided yet whether shooting or hanging would suit you best. I intend to be guided by the recommendation of this lady." Derby turned to Nancy as he spoke. "Personally, I should recommend strapping him to his horse and taking him to the first camp whose morals were still lax enough to permit the men to revel in the pleasing occupation of lynching. I suppose we could not get him hanged legally within two hundred miles."

Nancy Gale turned to the window and looked out in silence. The power of deciding on life or death lay in the hands of a girl of twenty-two. Symmonds, watching her with desperate intensity, struggled to guess which way the decision would lie.

Slowly she turned to the waiting men.

"If you are willing," she said to Gerard, "I shall let him go. He had been drinking. He cannot have known what he was doing."

Derby shrugged his shoulders.

"You are the judge. If I were, he should die."

Slowly he stooped above the man and with his knife cut the rope that bound him, covering him the while with the gun. Their eyes meeting — Gerard's scornful and disgusted, Symmonds's blazing still with wrath—sealed a compact of perpetual hatred that was bound to last until one or the other was incapable of mortal feeling.

Slowly Symmonds rose to his knees, gazing fixedly at the circle of blue steel in Gerard's hands that followed his every movement.

"Stranger, I have never seen you before, but I will see you again."

Brute that he was, Symmonds was no man to know fear. Even as he looked down the revolver barrel he sneered. "The time will come when every drop of blood in your body will cry for mercy for what you have done to-night," he added.

Had Derby known the future, the finger which lay on the trigger would have closed with a steady pressure; but he knew only the past and the present, and the instinct of generations of fair play prevented him from killing an unarmed man. He merely pointed to the door and silent, with set face, waited.

Symmonds, with never a look behind him, turned and walked slowly out into the night. Gerard followed him to the door and watched him seize the bridle of his pony, which, restive with the long wait, pawed the ground impatiently.

With a loud curse, Symmonds swung himself into the saddle and, plunging his spurs deep, rode off at a mad gallop down the trail.

Derby stood in the doorway, looking after him till he could no longer be seen, and the sound of his horse's hoofs grew faint and still fainter on the trail. Then he shut and bolted the door and drew the heavy storm shutters which covered the windows.

"It is best to take as few chances as possible with that kind of beast," he muttered to himself; then, turning to Nancy, he asked: "Have you no protection, not even a dog?"

"Yes, I have a collie; but he followed Patrick Moran this afternoon when he went for provisions."

"Don't let him leave you after this!" counseled Derby briefly. "Where is your gun?"

"It is hanging on the wall; I did not have time to reach it."

"Get it, and keep it in your belt always—*always*, do you hear? Good God! It is too terrible to think what might have happened if I had not come."

"Who are you, and what kind fate sent you to my help to-night?" broke in Nancy, gazing up, trembling, at her preserver.

She noticed, with feminine swiftness, the odd contrast of his rough, torn clothing and clumsy boots, with his well-trained voice and air of breeding.

"To answer your last question first," Derby responded, "you can tell me more about what brought me here than I can. I am a stockholder in the I. O. U. Mine. It seems to me that I have tramped from Seattle to Yucatan looking for it. Is this it?"

"This is the I. O. U. Mine," answered Nancy. "I hope—"

But she could go on no further. The courage with which she had borne herself throughout the scene with West Symmonds was but a woman's courage, after all; and the strain suddenly withdrawn, her overwrought nerves went to pieces. Crossing her arms on the table, she laid her head down upon them and began to sob with long-drawn, irregular breaths.

Derby showed his wisdom by a silence as sympathetic as it was complete. He drew out his pipe and lighted it; then sat quite still, waiting for the girl's storm of emotion to spend itself.

At length Nancy raised her head, looked at Derby an instant, and exclaimed: "I wish you had killed him!"

"How like a woman!" thought Gerard; but aloud he said: "I wish so, too; but it is too late now—for this time."

There was a grim emphasis on the last words which made Nancy shudder.

"Oh, no, no! I did not mean it," she insisted. "Let us forget it—at least, let us talk of something else."

"By all means," amended Gerard, realizing that Nancy was on the brink of a complete breakdown. "Let us talk of the mine. You were saying that you hoped—"

"I hope you have not built golden air castles as a stockholder. There is very little here to show, but father and I have hoped and still hope. I'm Nancy Gale, you know."

Gerard did not know; but nodded as if the name had been familiar from childhood.

"You must be our one stockholder about whom I've so often heard father speak; but no, you cannot be, because father always said that he—" Nancy stopped abruptly, coloring red.

"What is the matter?" asked Derby. "What did he always say?"

"Oh, I know you are not the one! Father said that he was rich as Crœsus and mean as a miser; and besides, he must be a man close to father's age, as he always said he hoped that, as a boyhood friend, the man would help him."

"What was his name?" asked Gerard.

"Austin Derby, I think."

Gerard looked at her and laughed.

"No, I am not Austin Derby," he said. "But I have probably inherited most of his qualities except his power of making money. I am Gerard Derby, his son."

Nancy looked at him with an expression of frank misery.

"Oh, I am sorry!" she exclaimed. "Please — please forgive me for what I said!"

"Do not worry," answered Gerard. "Father always was a bit peculiar, so I don't blame your father for what he thought. Besides, his being peculiar is the reason why I am here myself. He

suddenly turned me adrift in the world with my certificate of shares in the I. O. U. mine as my one best bet. His letter to that effect reached me in Egypt, and since then I have found that he would not do for his own son much more than you say he has done for his boyhood friend."

"In Egypt, did you say!" exclaimed Nancy, suddenly remembering Gladys Hayden's letter. "How strange! Only this morning I was reading a letter from Gladys Hayden, who spoke of meeting you there."

Her quick eyes noted the slight shadow that crossed his face at the mention of Gladys's name, and she guessed that Gladys, too, must have heard of his disinheritance, and have acted accordingly.

"Yes, I knew her there," and Gerard colored slightly in spite of himself. "But tell me," he went on quickly, though he longed to know what the letter had said, "how you happen to be here alone. Where is your father? Where are the men who work at the mine? The camp, as I came through it to-night, looked like a village of the dead. The only human being I have seen within the last forty miles was that brute Symmonds."

"I will tell you; but it is a long story," replied Nancy. "First, though, have you had supper? If you have walked from Seattle to Yucatan, looking for the I. O. U., you must be hungry. What there is to eat I am afraid is cold and unpalatable; but it is the best I have."

Derby confessed that not only had he been without supper, but without lunch as well, and he seated himself at the table gratefully. Nancy set before him the bacon and tea which were to have been her own meal, pretending that she had already eaten. She seated herself opposite him, and with her chin propped in her hands, told him simply of the struggle she had gone through and of her father's disappearance.

As she told of the work which she had done, Gerard involuntarily looked at her hands, bruised and roughened from toil, and swore softly to himself. Nancy, misinterpreting his glance, felt shame for the very signs of work of which earlier she had been proud. Had his mind not dwelt for months upon a girl of another type he would have noticed more particularly the charm of the little figure before him.

"Only last week," continued Nancy, "I still had three Mexicans working; but Symmonds came and talked to them, and they left. The others went a month ago as soon as there was not money to pay them. I could borrow nothing. The house in Los Angeles that always sold us supplies on credit, suddenly wrote that they would send no more.

"But worst of all is the desperate worry I feel about father. I cannot imagine what can have happened. Only to-night Symmonds" (she trembled at the mention of his name) "hinted that he knew where he was; but I think it was a lie. We have only one month more in which to complete the assessment work on the claims, and at best we can only save one.

"You see, we have got to do five hundred dollars' worth of work on each to hold them, and there are ten claims. Personally I do not care; but ever since father located them he has put his whole heart into their development, and I feel that I must save them."

Derby had finished eating and sat smoking, listening to her intently.

"But what is Symmonds's strange power here?" he asked as she finished her story. "He seems to be the devil incarnate."

"I do not know," answered Nancy. "All the men appear to bow down before him. I somehow feel as if every one of our misfortunes could be traced to him. Old Patrick Moran, the one man who has stood by me, has an idea that there is some great order or brotherhood of which he is the head, made up of some of the worst criminals in the West."

"Miss Gale!" exclaimed Gerard, holding out his hand impulsively, "you have made the pluckiest fight I ever heard of, and you shall not fight it out alone. We

will see this thing through to the end, and we will win.

"We stockholders of the I. O. U. mine," he continued, "are going to protect our interests to the limit. Six months ago I could have raised all the money we needed in two days by telegraph.

"Now," he added ruefully, "I am afraid that seventeen dollars make up my entire stock of worldly goods, and that is the net result of six months of labor. But do not be discouraged! We will find a way out somehow. To-morrow you can show me what the work you have been doing is like, and I guess that by figuring my time as of special value we can make a bluff at saving some of the claims anyhow. I don't believe father ever padded any of his corporation pay-rolls for a more moral purpose."

As Derby ended his sentence he caught the tired look in Nancy's eyes and realized that she ought to have rest.

"The shack next this is empty, I suppose?" he asked abruptly.

"Yes, except for Patrick."

"Good! With your permission I'll make that my temporary home, and if Mr. West Symmonds appears on the scene again we will very soon know the reason."

His words infused a new courage into Nancy. Although the future was still hazy, the blackest of the clouds had lifted, and her heart went out with a glow of appreciation to the Heaven-sent stranger who had done so much for her. She took a lantern from its hook beside the door and lighted it.

"Come!" she said to Derby, "I will show you your new home."

As they groped their way together across the rough ground to the next shack, Gerard placed his arm lightly upon her to steady her stumbling footsteps. A thrill ran through her frame such as she had never before experienced. The door was unlocked, and the lantern light showed them the whole of the small rough room with its two bunks.

On a shelf, amid pipes and ore specimens belonging to old Moran, was a candle in a battered tin holder. Derby lighted it and placed it on the board which, nailed across two boxes, served as a table.

"This is a palace, compared with some of the places in which I have lived recently," he remarked. "I shall do famously here. Now, Miss Gale, I will guide you back to your shack, and in the morning, we will first find old Patrick, and then we will make the old I. O. U. mine hum."

As he extended his hand, in saying good night at her door, Nancy pressed it in both of hers, and her eyes filled with tears of gratitude as she bowed her head so close over his hand that a warm tear moistened it.

Gerard stumbled back to his cabin, kicked off his boots, and flinging himself on one of the bunks, slept the sleep of the exhausted.

For Nancy Gale, however, there was no such thing as sleep. Her nerves were tense with excitement, and the events of the day reeled themselves over and over like a moving-picture film before her mind.

Through the chinks of the shutters, which at Derby's insistence she had kept closed, she watched the slow turning of night to dawn, of dawn to day. At length her ear caught the welcome sound of a familiar bark—

She flung open the windows, threw back the shutters, and gave a low whistle, followed by a call of "Bruno! Here, Bruno! Good dog!" which brought a thoroughbred collie bounding to the foot of the steps.

Nancy ran to the door, and as she threw it wide, the dog rushed through it and ran round and round the shack, wagging his tail and giving little staccato yelps of joy.

His mistress turned to watch him, a smile upon her face. As she looked she perceived that a card was tied to his collar.

Calling the dog to her, she leaned over and scanned the bit of pasteboard. On

it was printed three words: "Not This Time."

Just what the message meant Nancy could not determine; but there was something ominous and menacing in its mystery which caused her heart to sink. Her courage revived a moment later, however, when she heard a cheerful Irish voice outside chanting with more energy and good will than perfect harmony the chorus of "The Low-Backed Car."

Again she ran to the door, and to her joy saw Patrick Moran striding up the trail. A burlap sack of supplies was slung over his sturdy shoulders.

"What has happened to you, Patrick?" she called, running forward to meet him.

He swung the sack from his shoulders to the ground before he attempted to answer her.

"I'm not sure, meself, miss," he replied; "but this I know, there was some black work done the same now. I came to in Esperanza Hospital, and whin no one was lookin', early this morning, I got out and started back as fast as me legs would carry me. Did the pony come back?" he asked anxiously.

She shook her head. "I have not seen him."

"Perhaps the little baste wint to the corral himself. He was wise enough to," responded Moran hopefully. "I'll go and look."

A moment later a cheerful shout from the corral told that he had found the horse.

"There he was, standin' by the bars, as quiet as a lamb," he told Nancy a few minutes later.

"West Symmonds and his crowd may be smart enough to get the old man, but they'll be after going some when they get away with that pony."

"Oh, but it is good to see you again!" exclaimed Nancy. "You cannot imagine how I worried for you. After breakfast I have a lot to tell you. When you go to your shack you will find a stranger there. His name is Gerard Derby, and when I have told you about him, you will know what a friend he has been. I will have breakfast ready in half an hour, and then we can exchange stories at length."

Patrick carried the sack of supplies inside, and then stepped over to his shack to wake the newcomer.

CHAPTER VI.

RINGED WITH UNSEEN FOES.

"TELL me, Moran," said Derby the next morning, "if Symmonds is such a bad *hombre* as he seems to be, why has he taken such half-way measures? Why, when he must have had a thousand chances to do you up for good, hasn't he done so?"

Moran puckered his grizzled eyebrows and stared at the bowl of the pipe he was filling.

"That's after puzzling me, too," he said. "But whin I see a cat refusin' cream I know there's a reason, and it's generally that she don't want to be seen taking it. I reckon there must be some such reason why Symmonds don't want to come into any undue notice at present. And it's a hundred dollars to two bits I know why.

"The mail-coach was held up over at Vedas a while since and there was some one as got about twenty thousand dollars out of it. They say as how the U. S. Secret Service men has been getting kind of busy round the neighborhood, and any one who was on that little job would be wise to kape good from the skin out for a while. Any deaths round here for a spell has got to look accidental."

Breakfast over, Patrick and Derby went down to the gulch to work on the tunnel which had been started in the side hill, as without hoisting machinery a shaft had been impossible. Nancy begged to be allowed to come and help them; but Gerard persuaded her that it was not necessary.

"Miss Gale," he said, "we have got

to do five thousand dollars' worth of work on all these claims this month to hold them, and some one must cook for the 'shift' and also continue the assaying. You used to help your father do that, didn't you?"

"Yes," answered Nancy, "I think I could do it if I could break up the specimens."

"We will crush up a basketful from the stuff taken out yesterday and you can experiment on that. The only way by which we can ever get any capital from any one is by being able to show an ore vein that really assays high and does not merely run in streaks and hopes."

The gulch where the tunnel was located was only a few minutes' walk from the shack and the men soon reached it. Moran explained that they had only been able to go in about thirty feet as yet, since the small amount of timber which they had for shoring necessitated very light "shots," and the rock was of brittle structure.

When they reached the entrance Moran suddenly seized Derby's arm as the latter, having lighted his candle, was preparing to stoop his way inside.

"Wait a bit. Some one has been here since I have. If he wuz here now he'd not to be here at all, but in a hotter place."

The Irishman stooped and picked up a cigarette butt from the ground.

"I niver smoke those things nor anything but a man-sized pipe. A man who knew his business," he went on, "and wuz not too tender-hearted 'bout how many men he hurt might loosen up that light shoring pretty easy, and whoever did get hurted wouldn't know what happened him."

As he spoke, he drew his revolver from its holster that hung from his suspender. Standing at the mouth of the tunnel he fired two shots into it in rapid succession. The heavy .45 sent a crashing reverberation through the tunnel. The echo was followed by a sliding thud and within five feet of the entrance a great mass of the roof of the tunnel caved in, completely blocking the entrance.

"King of glory! It's lucky we are this side!" exclaimed Moran, spitting on his hands contemplatively. "Still I'm thinkin' that finishes our little tunnel for a while. All we can do now is to start quarrying a bit."

They turned and walked slowly back up the hill, to meet Nancy, who was hurrying toward them to find out the reason for the shots. She gave an exclamation of relief when she saw them.

Moran merely explained that the shots had been fired to test the tunnel and that it had caved in. Both he and Gerard had agreed that it was best to give her no more cause for worry than was necessary, until a time came when they could take some active steps.

They had decided that until they could obtain help from somewhere, one or the other of them should be with Nancy constantly.

All the rest of that day they toiled on one of the claims where no work had been done, clearing and stacking mesquite wood and prying loose what scattered boulders they could in order to determine the most favorable place to start "open face working," as with the collapse of the tunnel they had abandoned hope of being able to reach the richer ore vein which they thought might lie beneath the surface.

While they worked Gerard questioned Moran with a view of finding out as much as he could about West Symmonds. He related the story which he had heard as to an organization of "Vampas," and asked whether Patrick believed that there was any truth in it.

"Indade thin I do," replied the old miner, punctuating his words with steady blows of the pick. Many's the camp I've worked in more or less, and whiniver there was a trace of West Symmonds or his men in the neighborhood, there was after being trouble. Sometimes it was all over whin they appeared, but they

wuz always around, and if iver one of thim wuz caught red-handed, by some means, the others would be there to swear their black souls away, or if nade be to make a fight for it.

"First and last there's few places in the territory where I haven't been. If I've seen one man killed, I've seen a hundred. But most ivery time I've found a man with a bullet in the back of his head, or heard of a hold up, it's always been near to the time some of that Esperanza outfit was round. And yet the divils are wise! There ain't no one in the territory as can say he knows for certain. I'm thinkin' that if any one gets so he knows, he don't live long enough to say much."

"How long have they had Esperanza for their headquarters?" asked Gerard.

"Nigh onto six years," replied Moran. "Now there's another case— Poor old 'Tennessee Bob,' he located three claims, and one day Symmonds goes up there to look them over. I don't suppose any one iver will know just what happened. Symmonds sez as how he shot himself. Anyhow there was poor Bob lying with a gun in his hand, and a big hole in his temple. The hole was in the left temple at that! But West Symmonds he was and is sheriff here, and he sticks to the story.

"Man, that crowd are getting out great piles of ore from poor old Bob's claims. No one really knows how rich they are, for they pass their men double wages, and even thim chattering Mexicans will keep quiet if you pays 'em enough!"

At last Moran's practised eye determined on a site where the outcroppings showed strong promise and they abandoned ax and pick for sledge and drill. Alternating as driller and churner they sank their first hole, to the depth of the third size drill.

When Moran returned from the magazine carrying the camel-colored sticks of dynamite, his face wore a troubled expression.

"It's only about forty sticks there is left," he observed, "and we can't keep going long on thim. However, we'll do what we can, and the blessed saints be with us!"

He slit two "sticks" with his knife and deftly inserted the fuse.

"It's clumsy," he muttered, "to fire a hole without a battery, but maybe she'll go all right."

He set the fuse, then tamped the sticks lightly into the hole with a wooden tamping rod, and carefully closed the edges with dirt and loose rock. Fishing in his pockets he produced a card of sulfur matches and breaking one off from the row, struck it on his trousers, then applied the lighted end to the ten-foot fuse which hissed and sputtered like a thing alive.

He and Gerard crawled beneath a neighboring ledge to await the "shot."

When the smoke of the explosion had cleared away, Moran peered into the great cleft in the earth with quiet satisfaction.

"Give a man powder enough and time enough and he could let the people down in hell loose," he exclaimed.

"Suppose we call it half a day and quit," he continued. "It must be close to five and supper about ready."

Gerard readily assented, and they went back to the shack. Nancy greeted them with cheerful reports of her assaying, declaring that the copper had run the highest of any that they had yet struck, with almost four dollars silver and gold to the ton, in addition to the copper.

Moran, with the good habits of one brought up to a life of toil, betook himself to bed shortly after supper. He lifted the key to the magazine from its accustomed hook and slipped it into his pocket.

"There's not as much powder there as I wish there was," he remarked as he went out, "but I'll sleep the better for having the key under me pillow."

When he had gone Gerard questioned

Nancy closely in order to obtain all the information he could about her father's disappearance.

Mr. Gale, it seemed, had given no specific address where he was to be found in New York; but Gerard wrote letters to the two hotels where he had most frequently stayed. He also wrote to a classmate of his own who was an assistant district attorney, explaining the circumstances and asking that whatever search was possible should be made for the missing man.

"The trouble is," he said to Nancy, as he finished his letters, "that we have no real clue from which to start. We are not even sure that your father ever reached New York.

"However by starting this inquiry we are doing something. If there has been any unexplained disappearance, Carrington, in the district attorney's office, will be likely to have a record of it and trace it down."

Nancy sighed. "If we could only find out anything! Nothing could be worse than this absolute suspense. When a chance comes to get the letters mailed I shall feel that at least there is something to hope for."

They went out onto the little porch and seated themselves on the steps. All round them like sentinels stretched black mountain walls that seemed to shut them off from the outer world absolutely. Not a breath of air was stirring, and in sympathy with the silence about them they talked in low voices.

Nancy questioned Derby as to the world beyond the seas about which she knew only from the point of view of one who has eagerly read, and he talked to her in the careless manner of one who has seen most of the things of life without realizing the opportunities he was having.

"I do envy you so!" she exclaimed, when in answer to some allusion of hers he had spoken of experiences along the Riviera. "When I think how narrow my own life has been and to think that you have seen and lived in the places I have dreamed about!"

"There is very little to envy," he answered. "Until the last six months I have never known what living really was."

He outlined to her his adventures since he had left San Francisco.

"Those are the only things that have really ever taught me anything," he went on. "And at the school in which I am a beginner, you have been brought up. It is you who are fortunate. No life which one sees merely as an onlooker really becomes a part of one at all."

He stopped abruptly. From the rocks on the left of the shack there came a clicking sound as of a metal tipped shoelace trailed over a rough pavement. In the absolute quiet of the night the rattle sounded sharp and distinct.

"Are there many rattlers round here?" he asked.

"The cliffs are full of them," answered Nancy, unconsciously tucking her feet beneath her as if for protection.

Derby drew from his pocket the short wand that Selim Beg had given him on the steamer from Alexandria. The moonstone in the handle glistened clear in the darkness.

"Perhaps, after all, my Hindu friend was right, and I may have need to be a snake charmer some day," he laughed, repeating to her the incident on the steamer. "I am afraid, however, that the common sense Yankee rattlesnake might not be affected by the same mystic formulas that seem to be effective with cobras and other denizens of the Far East. I hope I shall not be forced to try."

Nancy took the wand from his hand and examined it curiously. The wondrously woven silks about the stick seemed the very incarnation of the spirit of snakedom.

Gerard rose to say good night. He looked down approvingly at the revolver which hung from her belt.

"If I were you," he said, laying his

hand on the gun, "I'd keep that pretty close to me most of the time. If you want help, it is the best little caller there is."

The moon had risen full, and as he walked along the ridge to his shack, he noticed the beauty of the alternating streaks of black and silver. Bushes and trees stood against the sky-line almost clearer than in daylight.

Sharply the silence of the night was broken by the shrieking *crescendo* whine of a bullet. Derby instinctively dropped to the ground. In his hat, which had fallen from his head, were two small, clean punctures. There was no report.

Derby crawled the rest of the way to the shack, where by the moonlight streaming in at the window he examined the hole.

"It is no time to take a chance with a light," he muttered to himself as he twisted the hat round and round in his hands.

"Thirty-thirty and steel jacketed," he said critically, looking at the neat punctures. "A good shot at that. And no possible clue. It might have been fired from a mile away or within two hundred yards. When Maxim invented the silencer, he opened the way to possibilities of crime that would make the Borgias blush at their ignorance and incompetence."

Softly he awakened Moran and showed him his hat.

"It seems to me our friends are getting less particular in their methods," he whispered. "Perhaps your friends of the secret service have given up the chase. I think that from now on we'd better take turns in sleeping and watching. It is ten now. Turn in again, and I will call you at two."

Moran assented to the arrangement.

"Keep a good lookout toward the magazine," he said, as he turned over in preparation for his four hours' sleep. "If you see a shadow move there, shoot."

Derby, crouched with his back against the outer wall of the shack and rifle across his knee, kept guard until the moonlight on his watch-face showed him that the hour of two was past. Then he called Moran and turned in, to a sleep that was filled with fitful dreams, through all of which shown out the dark, sinister face of West Symmonds.

A challenge and two shots in quick succession awakened him, and he jumped to his feet, seized his rifle, and rushed to the door. He could just see in the half-light Moran's figure running toward the magazine. He started to follow, when, with a blinding flash and a roar as of a thousand thunderclaps rolled into one, the gulch burst asunder.

Gerard was hurled from his feet and onto the ground. Instinctively he held his arms over his head, as though they could be any protection again the rain of boulders and timber that fell from the sky. Regaining his feet, he staggered forward fifty yards through the blinding smoke, until he tripped and fell over a limp form. It was the body of faithful Moran, who had given his life in protection of his employer's daughter.

"By God, some one will pay for this!" gasped Derby, as he tore open the old miner's shirt and placed his hand over the silent heart. The lifting smoke showed no human figure in the landscape.

"Clever!" he groaned. "Another '*accident.*'"

He picked his way through the tangled wreckage to Nancy's shack, his mind filled with ominous foreboding. The walls were riddled as if from the fire of artillery, but Nancy Gale, unscathed, flung open the door to him, her long hair falling in waves down over her shoulders and her hazel eyes dilated wide with excitement and fear.

She said nothing, merely looked up into his face questioningly, waiting for him to speak.

"The magazine!" he gasped briefly. "They got it, and poor old Patrick evidently saw them and tried to make a fight for it. I heard his two shots, then the explosion. I found his body."

The tears streamed down Nancy's

cheeks as she caught the meaning of Derby's words.

"He was a faithful comrade," she said brokenly; "'faithful unto death!'"

At the earliest break of dawn, when the sun was touching the hill-tops with gold, Gerard carried Patrick's body to a spot near the site where the magazine had stood, and laying it tenderly in the natural grave caused by the explosion, he filled in the depression from the masses of loose rock and earth. With his jack-knife he carved a rough headboard and wedged it in the rocks.

Then he went back for Nancy, and standing, simply, hand in hand above the grave, they prayed a silent prayer for the departed friend.

"I wish there were something more that we could do," said Derby.

Nancy climbed up on the hillside to where some hardy flowers grew amid the forbidding rocks. She gathered them and laid them lovingly upon the grave.

Then Gerard took her hand and gently led her back to the shack.

CHAPTER VII.

THE TREAD BEHIND.

GERARD had told Nancy that he intended to make it his first business to trace every detail of the attack on the powder-magazine. She was much surprised, therefore, on going to the brook for water to find him seated on a log by the stream, his knife in one hand and a bit of soft, mottled wood in the other.

"I thought that you were intent on investigations," she said, coming up close behind him, "and here you are like a schoolboy wiling away his recess by whittling a stick!"

"True enough," answered Derby calmly. "Won't you sit down and talk to me while I work?"

"Work! I don't call that work!" exclaimed the girl impatiently. "How can you waste your time at it when there is so much of importance to be done?"

"Because," observed Derby, neatly removing the mottled bark and pricking his knife deep into the pith, "because I feel that the more at ease my mind is about you, the faster I can accomplish things when I get to work. Now, can you guess what I am making?"

"A whistle?" guessed Nancy, seating herself on the log.

"Precisely, a whistle. It can be used for various purposes—to call me, for instance, if I am at the corral when dinner is ready; or—"

"Yes," echoed Nancy significantly, "*or*—I understand."

"It is a comfort that you do understand so readily. It saves a lot of explanation. Where is Bruno?"

"Chained under the shack."

"Keep him with you, even when you go as far as the brook. His bark is even more carrying than this." As he spoke, he raised the little cylinder to his eye and looked through it toward the sky.

"Not a very satisfactory job," he commented; "but I can finish it more ornamentally this evening. Now let us agree upon a code of signals. If you want me a little for some small thing, blow once, like this. If you want me suddenly, blow twice. If you want me desperately, blow three times very fast—like this. Now, good-by!"

"Good-by!" responded Nancy, picking up her pail; "and do be careful of yourself, instead of thinking so much about me!"

The thought of West Symmonds hung like a blight on Derby's spirits. But for that he could have taken blithely all the hardships of camp life and the gamble of putting in years of hard work for perhaps small profits and slow returns.

In looking back on his first encounter with Symmonds, he almost blamed himself for letting his enemy escape. It was becoming evident to him that this Symmonds was more than the ordinary bad man, that he had some sort of organization back of him, and that there was a dangerous conspiracy afoot, a conspiracy

which had already faithful Patrick Moran as a victim, and now was sure to make every effort to remove Derby in order to rob Nancy of her last protection.

In vain Gerard racked his brain to discover a means of escape for Miss Gale. There was no telegraph within a hundred miles. The nearest place from which a letter could be sent was Independence, and Symmonds was not a man to scruple at tampering with the mails.

Finally the problems of the future grew so oppressive that Derby turned away from them with a shrug of his shoulders, and devoted his attention to the details of the present and the immediate outlook for the I. O. U. mine.

He spent the morning examining the damage caused by the explosion. Without powder there was very little work that could be done. He repaired the shack as best he could with the scanty materials at hand and took stock of their supplies. At best, there was only enough to last them for a week, and the fact that Derby did not dare leave Nancy to go in search of more, complicated the problem.

While he was walking about the edge of the new-formed crater, he paused and leaned against a huge boulder, which before the explosion had been wedged tight with smaller rocks. He and Moran had commented on it, as the wedging rocks seemed to lie in almost mathematical regularity.

To his surprise the boulder rocked when his weight rested against it. More from idle curiosity than for any real purpose, he got his crowbar and inserting it under the upper edge, using a rock as a fulcrum, began to sway the boulder up and down. At his fourth heave the great rock seemed to hesitate, then slowly topple, and with leaping bounds went crashing down the hill into the cañon, sweeping before it with irresistible force anything that stood in its way.

When his eyes ceased to follow the boulder and dropped to the place where it had stood, Derby gave an exclamation of surprise. Before him was the open mouth of a triangular-shaped shaft, some four feet across at its base.

He crawled to the edge, hardly daring to believe his sight, and peered down. But he could see no bottom, only abyssmal blackness. His hand rested upon a stone whose sharpness bothered him, and he looked down at it suddenly.

The stone was highly polished and ground down to a fine edge. The upper part was deep-notched. It was evidently an old Indian stone hatchet. On it were carved small symbols, crude sketches of animals.

Gerard raked his memory, striving to remember where he had seen similar marks. He recalled at last that he had seen an Aztec collection in the museum, and that some of the specimens had been similarly carved.

He again looked down into the shaft. The smooth-cut sides, devoid of any trace of timbering, told of labor done at an age when years of toiling labor with bronze tools had done the work that modern science, with electric drill and giant power, made light of.

As he examined the shaft more carefully, he saw in one of the angles a series of notches some two feet apart and not very deep.

"I wonder how far down those notches go," he said to himself. "It is a primitive sort of ladder, but it looks safe enough. If there is a real shaft sunk here, the I. O. U. ought to be able to claim sufficient assessment work to complete its title for good and all!"

He thought of returning to tell Nancy of his discovery.

"After all," he thought, "if it only goes down a little way, it will only be another disappointment for her to bear. Here goes to find out."

Cautiously he swung himself over the edge, and lowering himself to his elbows, dropped his feet until they fitted into the second notch. His feet, clad in heavy boots, got but little grip, and he drew himself to the surface again.

"Whoever used that ladder must have

gone barefoot," he reflected, and taking off his boots and heavy socks, he again lowered himself carefully over the edge of the shaft.

The purchase that he now obtained was much more firm. Slowly, bracing himself against the sharp angle of the side wall, he climbed down and down until the patch of sky above him grew to a small speck.

His fingers ached; but he kept on, doggedly resolved to solve the mystery. He had counted his steps, and as he lowered himself for the three hundred and forty-ninth time, his feet struck hard on rough bottom, instead of on the expected notch.

He rested, breathing hard from his exertion.

" That must be almost seven hundred feet," he said to himself. " And to think that if I am right in my guess that this shaft was sunk by aborigines, they must have hoisted the excavated rock in baskets all the way to the surface! That may account for those strange rock-heaps that almost dam the gulch."

Carefully he pivoted himself and, leaning back against the wall, took his candle-spike from his pocket and, lighting the stub of candle in the holder, looked about to discover whether he stood upon a ledge or upon the bottom of the shaft. A ghastly sight met his eyes. The place was piled high with heaps of bones and skeletons. Some of the skeletons lay stretched at full length, others were propped in sitting postures against the walls.

Scattered about were splintered and crushed skulls, and bones jammed through skeletons to which they did not belong. Evidently some of the bodies had fallen the length of the shaft and crushed down upon others.

The shaft was larger at the bottom than at the top by perhaps seven feet, yet was not more than, roughly, ten feet by five in circumference. Into this narrow space were jammed the twisted bones of between twenty-five and thirty skeletons.

Into Derby's awed mind there flashed the horrible explanation; the sudden flight of the tribe before a Spanish or earlier enemy; the concealment of the treasure-shaft by the huge boulder, and the forgetting or wilful desertion of those beneath the ground at the crisis.

Was it three hundred, was it a thousand years ago that the desperate fight for life had taken place? He imagined the frantic ascent of the difficult ladder; the desperate efforts to move the boulder that sealed them in; the despair when the weaker must have hurled themselves down to die; the agonies of the stronger, waiting, hoping against hope, and gradually dying of hunger and thirst.

Gerard felt a wild impulse to ascend and leave the awful place; but he conquered his nerves, and, holding his candle close down, continued his examination.

In a corner, so covered with bones that he had not at first noticed it, was an aperture some three feet in height. Overcoming his repugnance, he pushed aside the bones and crawled inside.

Within five feet the passageway grew in height. The character of the rock changed from diorite to limestone. Evidently the softer rock had encouraged the crude workers, for the tunnel grew in size, and he could walk erect.

He felt his way cautiously along, wary of unseen pitfalls, one hand clasping his candle and the other sliding along the smooth wall. In a hundred yards that beneath his right hand slanted sharply back, and he realized that he must have reached the " stope."

His candle showed but dimly the beginning of a chamber as to whose vastness he could only guess.

Scattered about the floor the flickering light of the candle showed him many more skeletons. The air of the place was reeking with humidity, and he found it hard to breathe.

Holding his candle close to the wall, he moved along, trying to form some guess as to the richness of the ore. After progressing a few feet, he came upon huge deposits of what seemed almost pure copper.

Gerard had heard of the rich finds in

the Superior region, but in the low-grade ores of the Southwest he realized that such a deposit could only be a freak of nature, almost supernatural in its origin. Yet the light of the candle continued at each further step to fall upon masses of almost pure ore!

So excited had he been in his discoveries that he had not noticed how low his light was burning, until a larger drop of hot wax than usual falling upon his hand caused him to look down and see that there remained but a fraction of an inch of candle in his holder. He regretfully turned, and was making his way back to the "drift" by which he had entered, when his attention was caught by a series of taps below him. He started, his nerves unstrung by the sights he had seen. Then he listened intently.

In steady, even succession came the taps, as of steady drumming with fingers on a window-pane. He lay down and put his ear to the ground, realizing that the sounds were either supernatural or that human beings were working not very far away.

He knew from his experiences with tunnel gangs that sounds will carry through solid rock for phenomenal distances. The sound might be close at hand or a hundred feet away.

Suddenly the floor upon which he lay cracked and gave. He made a desperate plunge in an effort to reach safety, but without avail. His hands, outstretched in desperate groping, caught nothing, and he fell.

There flashed through his mind the picture of the crushed skulls that he had seen in the bottom of the shaft, and then, with a plunge, he slid into space.

So quickly that he had hardly had time to realize his sensations in falling, he landed on solid rock. As he picked himself up, bruised but uninjured, he realized that he could not have dropped more than ten feet.

Crawling on hands and knees in the dark—as in his fall he had dropped his candle—he suddenly put his hand on cold steel. He slid his fingers along the metal and it continued. It was a rail.

Cautiously he groped on his other side and felt there another rail. They were rusty, showing that the drift was an abandoned one.

"I must have fallen into mine workings," he told himself, "and modern ones at that; but where on earth can they have come from?"

Suddenly he thought of Moran's story about the direction of the tunnel of the Esperanza mine. He whistled softly to himself.

"They must be getting their ore from directly below the I. O. U., instead of following their own vein. No wonder Symmonds and his crowd are rich! It is a perfect Bonanza. Symmonds must have got the story of the great deposit from some Indian, and figured out where it must lie. He only missed it by a few feet, at that!"

He halted and pondered perplexedly as to his next step.

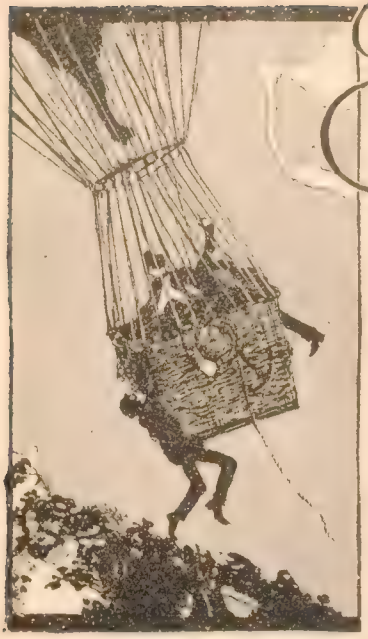
"If I come out into the Esperanza workings, I won't be much better off than I was before. Knowing I was on to their secret, that gang would undoubtedly make short work of me. Still, it seems there is nothing to do but keep on and trust to luck."

Presently he came to the end of the drift into which he had fallen, and reached a point where three other galleries converged. He hesitated, debating with himself which one to follow.

He did not hear the soft, catlike step that crept up behind him, and his first warning of danger was the flash of an electric pocket-lamp full in his face, blinding him. He flung out his arms instinctively, but too late.

Some supersense told him of the shadow above his head, as with a sweeping blow a three-foot drill, swung by powerful arms, crashed down, beating aside his arms as though they had been paper. He toppled and fell like a log.

(To Be Continued.)



The Brute, the Lady and I

by Edwin C. Dickenson

I.

LOOKING back on those days, my only apology is that I lived them according to my lights. "Brute" Flanagan lived them, doubtless, according to his.

As for Elizabeth Norcross, I believe she was lifted out of herself and above us. But for that I cannot say what would have happened.

I had gone to the State Fair. Not to see abnormal turnips and blooded calves, nor yet the horse-races. But to observe the people.

In a way, of course, this was business, since I am a professor of certain 'ologies having to do with the people. But this business, as one's business should be, was pleasure for me.

That morning, I remember, the subject of my lecture at the university had been the trite one of Intelligence *vs.* Brute Force. My contention had been that the former won out in the Stone Age as consistently as it did in the present.

I recollect that Brownell, a senior of parts, guilelessly inquired whether or not this was a rule of universal application. On my assurance that it most certainly was, he had the temerity to ask if it was intelligence or brawn that won battles on the gridiron.

Waiving his impertinence, I proved to my own satisfaction, at least, that without intelligence no amount of brawn could win even a football game. And then, I admit it more cheerfully now, he proved, apparently to the satisfaction of the class, that without brawn no amount of intelligence could win a football game.

I mention this now, not alone because I have come to see that we were both right, but that, being mere men, neither of us considered that the spirit was master of both force and intelligence.

But to return to the fair. I wandered through the various booths, past the strident-voiced barkers, across the race-track to where the excitement-seeking crowd was gathering about a half-inflated balloon.

Here were those, I reflected, about to face death for the amusement of the people—and a measly stipend. I crowded close to see how it sat upon their faces.

By closing my eyes, I can see Elizabeth Norcross as I saw her then; a slip of a

girl with the black curly head of a boy and the dark, serious eyes of a dreamer. Exquisite is the adjective I should choose in describing her.

Not tall enough to be called beautiful nor small enough to be described as dainty, her features, limbs, fingers, were exquisite in their perfect proportion. Her carriage, the serenity of her expression as she looked out over that sea of faces, told of blood and breeding.

There was nothing of bravado in them, nothing of fear. She stood alone in the car or basket attached to the balloon, the great folds of the latter undulating sinuously above her as it took the gas.

Her father (I afterward learned it was he) was superintending the filling of the great gas-bag, adjusting the net ropes to the gathering-ring as it slowly filled. He, too, appeared to be superior to his present occupation.

He was a short, slender man, with the forehead and stooped shoulders of the student and the weary eyes of one who had failed in his chief aim in life.

And then I saw Brute Flanagan.

He stood on the opposite side of the car from me, at the girl's back. His great size dwarfed her by comparison to the dimensions of a child.

His arms were folded across his chest, which made his shoulders seem even wider than they were. His low forehead and prognathous jaw, his small, shrewd eyes, with the lids half down over them, and full, coarse lips gave him the mark of the beast.

"Brute" I named him then, and events showed that I was not far from right.

I watched him curiously, as much fascinated by his exactness to type as by the girl's originality. It seemed to me that his eyes never left her. He watched her as a cat watches a bird, and in spite of the abstractness of my observations, something burned hot in me at the sight of it. It seemed a profanation.

And now let me try to describe as best I can what happened in that next minute.

The bag had filled. The aeronaut had made fast all of his net-ropes to the gathering-ring which formed the rim of the car, and affixed in place the bags of sand ballast.

He stood, a dozen feet away in the crowd, conferring with a man I judged to be his manager. The balloon was held in place by four attendants, whose weight was sufficient to anchor it.

There came, first, a far-away shout of alarm that gathered volume and disturbing significance. I looked in the direction of it, as did the crowd.

My eyes rested on the tops of a near-by grove of maples. They were bending and writhing in mute agony. The air above them was filled with flying débris.

A grayish, foglike bank of cloud stretched to the zenith in awful menace. I knew what it was. I had been in one before, and the terror of it had never left me—a tornado.

A hoarse cry went up from the crowd, and it broke in all directions. I turned back to the balloon. The girl still stood where I had last seen her, as though petrified, powerless to move in the face of the approaching disaster.

"Jump!" I cried as I sprang toward her.

If she heard, above the roar of the approaching cyclone and the shouts of the mob, she gave no sign of it. Even in that moment of suspense, I noted the man, Brute Flanagan, beyond her.

His senses had apprised him of the chaos of the elements, but had not telegraphed the news to his small brain. He stood with open mouth, staring stupidly in the direction of its approach.

Beyond, and to the left of him, I was aware of an eddy in that fleeing mob, and out of it broke the girl's father, in his face an agony of fear.

But he was too late. As I reached the side of the car, the men who held it let go with shouts of fear. The great bag leaned to the blast and leaped away. Desperately I grasped the rim of the car in an insane thought to hold it. I was jerked from my feet as with the grasp of a Titan.

The roar of the wind and the shouts of the mob died away. Fearfully I looked down. A gray-brown plane of fields, orchards, and farmhouses swept a hundred feet below me.

I had never possessed a good stomach for high places. For a moment I felt a well-nigh irresistible desire to let go and have it over. Then, with a desperate effort, I raised myself until my eyes were on a level with the rim of the car.

The girl stood as though frozen in her place. Across the car from me a great form was climbing in. It was Brute Flanagan.

Whether he had gone to the rescue of the girl, or whether the car had struck him as it caromed away and he had clung instinctively to it as had I, I do not know to this day.

As I watched him, he squeezed between the ropes suspending the car from the gas-bag and tumbled to the floor of it. With a final effort, I surmounted the bags of ballast and tumbled on top of him, where I lay, too weak from fright to rise.

II.

THE Brute stirred uncomfortably beneath me, and having recovered my breath, I got gingerly to my feet and, clasping a supporting rope in each hand, stood beside the girl.

No sound came to my ears at that great height, and I had no sense of motion. We floated peacefully through space, with the earth a great bowl, below.

To my amazement and delight, I found that I was not even dizzy as I looked out into space. We were in a world of our own, and one so much at odds with the one we had just left that I wondered if this were not indeed death and, by some chance, I had gone to heaven.

A low exclamation from the girl brought me, if not to earth, to a more proper conception of our situation. She was pointing ahead and below, and I saw stretching away to the horizon, a great, blue-gray blanket.

"What is it?" I asked.

She answered: "The lake."

I looked back in the direction whence we had come.

The green-brown land was fading rapidly astern. The scene of our departure was indistinguishable. Houses were children's blocks; groves were lawns. If the tornado still raged on, there was no evidence of it from the heavens.

"An hour," I suggested, "and at this rate we will be across and over some Canadian hamlet."

"Yes," she replied gravely, "if we can hold this level."

"What do you mean by that?" I queried.

I felt very much as a landlubber might asking his first senseless questions of the captain of a liner.

"This ascent was planned for two persons," she explained. "My father and myself. To be sure, we had hoped to make a record flight, and the bag is filled to its greatest capacity. Yet, there is some difference between the weight of my father and the combined weight of you and the other—gentleman."

As she spoke she looked behind her at the great figure of the Brute, and I followed her gaze.

He was sitting now with his back to the side of the car. His face was greenish-yellow in color, and his eyes still retained an expression of fright.

Somehow it increased my enjoyment of this strange ride to know that he was not enjoying it.

The girl shrugged her shoulders and turned away. The contrast between his great body and his small spirit made him more repulsive than ever. She took up the conversation where she had left it.

"I have already released most of the ballast, saving only enough for an emergency. The next few minutes will determine whether we will carry across or not."

It soon became apparent that the girl's fears were groundless. I doubt if she realized the terrific rate at which we were traveling, and its effect on our buoyancy.

The Canadian hills broke the northern horizon and advanced rapidly to meet us. In considerably less than an hour we were over earth again, and then could be seen at what a frightful rate we were traveling, for the lake slid over the eastern horizon as though it had been made of quicksilver.

It would be as much as our lives were worth to land in that gale. Even I could understand that. The girl looked sadly down at the fleeting earth. The responsibilities as captain of this craft weighed heavily on her.

"We cannot land in this," she said, voicing our thoughts.

"And that means that we must travel all night?" I asked.

"We cannot land safely in the dark. Whether the bag will support us when the sun no longer warms it, I cannot say."

An hour went by, and the sun sank behind the edge of the great bowl below. The earth had been coming gradually to meet us.

We made out an occasional dwelling at greater intervals as we swept on. There even came to us the sound of voices, and once a flock of sheep, seeing the shape of this great bird, scattered in panic about their pasture.

The girl drew a handful of sand from one remaining bag and threw it over the side with a scrap of paper. I was astonished to see with what speed we rose above the latter.

"She has great buoyancy still," she observed, with more hope in her voice.

She threw out more sand, and the darkening earth fell away from us with no conscious movement on our part.

It had been a warm September day below, and I had worn flannels. With night and a greater altitude, the air grew as chill as that of a late October evening.

The girl thrust an arm into a large pocket sewed to the car and brought forth two sweaters. With a glance at the Brute, she passed me one and slipped into the other herself.

The big fellow need not have been offended. The sweater she had given me must have been her father's, and it fitted me rather snugly; he could never have got it on.

The stars grew in brilliancy, and now by Polaris I saw that we were traveling north by west. The Brute curled up in the bottom of the car, apparently trying to forget his predicament in sleep.

He looked like a great dog, the diameter of the car being too little for his length. Miss Norcross and I sat on folding seats that let down from the side. The girl gazed fixedly out into the night, as though silently praying for her ultimate escape.

Several times I tried to engage her in conversation; but with life hanging literally in the balance, small talk had no place, and I had no wish to worry her further by harping on our plight.

Yet there was one thing I grew more interested in as time went on, and that was the question of food. I mentioned this at last.

"How thoughtless of me!" she exclaimed.

She thrust her arm again into that deep pocket, and brought forth a package of biscuit and a can of sardines. These we made into sandwiches and ate with a relish after our long fast.

And now that she had eaten, the girl's spirits rose, and she grew more communicative. After all, she told me, she had made a dozen ascents with her father, and none of them had been attended with any serious mishap—why should this?

In the morning we would pick our landing place—meadowland, if it was possible—deflate the bag, and come to earth. It seemed simple enough now to her buoyant youth, and I had not the heart to remind her that with every hour we were being carried deeper into a trackless wilderness, visited at long intervals only by hunters and trappers.

It was not the landing, but the journey back that concerned me.

I asked her about herself, and how she and her father came to take up so dan-

gerous an occupation. I was not surprised to hear that it had been a case of expediency.

Her father, it seemed, had gone into aeronautics in an experimental way. And he had made discoveries, too, so the girl said. And as is quite often the case, some one else had reaped the benefits.

Her mother had died when she was a child, and they two had been all in all to each other. The time had come when, owing to his expenditures, Norcross's only asset was his balloon, and he had been obliged to enter into the business of flying as a livelihood.

He had gone up alone at first, but one day he had been blown away much as we were now being carried. All the following night the girl had waited for news of him, and then and there she had resolved that if he returned safely, never should he make another flight without her, and she had kept her word.

And now the memory of her own anguish on that other night brought home to her what his present grief must be at the thought of her predicament. She bowed her head, and I realized that she was silently weeping.

I tried to comfort her as best I could.

Her father would know from experience that we would carry across the lake. He must have seen, too, that she was not alone. Immediately on landing we would make our way to the nearest telegraph station and send him news of our safety. How near that station would be, I did not venture to suggest.

Poor child! Between her anxiety and the strenuous day she had been through, she was worn out. Presently her head drooped forlornly. She swayed unsteadily to the occasional spinning of the balloon.

She lurched against me at last, and, fearful that she would slip from her seat, I put an arm about her shoulders and held her.

And then she went to sleep.

It was a new experience for me. I found it a very precious one. I felt that she was given me to protect, that Providence had ordered that I should be near at hand when the blast came to guard her.

And I vowed that I would, if it be at the cost of my life. The time was near when I would have the opportunity.

Through the long night hours I stood watch. Now and then the girl stirred uneasily; but like a tired child, settled herself again without waking, her head on my shoulder.

The Brute, too, slept on. There was ample evidence of that in the uncouth sounds that came with unfailing regularity from the bottom of the car. Never had I marveled so at the immeasurable gulf between a gross man and a gentlewoman.

As for myself, I had no wish to sleep at first. I was a god who had spurned the pettiness of earth and taken up his abode among the clouds.

How I pitied the earthworms below! There was a peace, a dreamlike unreality, a content, the like of which I had never experienced. Never until now had I lived.

It grew colder toward morning, so cold that I believe but for the warmth of the girl's body against mine I could not have kept from shaking with the chill of it. I looked down at the dark blotch of earth. It seemed as if it were emerging out of the mists. Over the hills astern the gloom of night was lightening.

Then I became aware of the fact that Brute Flanagan's snoring had ceased. I looked down at him.

He was awake, sitting in his old position with his back against the side of the car, watching the two of us with a sour grin on his ugly lips.

"Got acquainted pretty quick, didn't you?" he sneered.

It was the first time I had heard him speak, and his guttural tones completed the impression his appearance had made on me.

I looked at him steadily without answering, and his eyes fell.

But the sound of his voice had roused

the girl. She looked about her with startled eyes, and the events of the previous day coming back to her, she slipped from her seat with the color coming into her cheeks.

Then she glanced sharply over the side, and I noted for the first time a soft, rushing sound that came up from below. I got to my cramped limbs and joined her.

A glance showed me that we had dropped until the guide-rope was trailing the tops of a forest of pines below.

Hastily the girl threw over the last of the sand, and we rose, not buoyantly, as had the gallant ship the night before, but wearily, as though she were sick to death and would seek Mother Earth as a last resting place.

Day was coming on swiftly now, and below us I could see an unbroken forest stretching in every direction. Another thing I noted, and that was that we were drifting lazily along.

The gale had left us, or we had dropped below it. Sluggishly we were being wafted toward a high hill that stood in our path.

I turned to the girl.

"Will we clear it?" I asked.

"I am afraid not," she answered tensely; and then: "Quick—our sweaters!"

She was out of hers in a moment and had cast it over the side. I followed suit as the tall pines of the summit of the hill drifted to meet us.

We cleared them by inches, and then the girl cried out with joy. A bowl-like valley lay before us, in its center a pond set like a jewel in the hills.

With the exception of a solitary oak, the shores of the pond were free of trees for a hundred yards back from the water's edge. As though our ship of the air had sought this quiet harbor through the long night, she settled wearily toward it.

The girl reached for a cord and pulled it. It opened the valve in the top of the great bag, I learned afterward, and hastened our descent.

As slowly we floated across the pond, I remember noticing with surprise that from this height I could see to the bottom of it. And then it seemed that we would carry on too far.

But Elizabeth Norcross knew what she was about. She pulled another cord, and the anchor, lashed to the outside of the car, went hurtling through the air and stuck at the edge of the pond.

"Hold fast!" cried the girl, and she pulled savagely at yet another cord.

I heard a ripping sound, and the great bag above us collapsed.

We came to earth with a jolt, lifted once, and struck again, this time to stay.

III.

MAN quickly adjusts himself from a a state of danger to one of temporary safety. The car had been thrown on its side when it struck the last time. With an instinct born of other experiences, Miss Norcross had clung to the net-ropes and landed on her feet.

Brute Flanagan and I were tumbled unceremoniously out, but without damage. The big man got to his cramped limbs, and tramped up and down the shore of the pond in an effort to restore circulation. Miss Norcross leaned weakly against the overturned car.

She had been under a greater strain than either of us realized. She was shivering with cold, too, and I made her put on my coat. Then I set about collecting wood for a fire, and presently had a lively blaze going, around which all three of us gathered.

As we stood there I looked over the ground. Hills rose steeply in a circle about the pond, shutting out any extended view of our way out of the wilderness. Half-way up the slopes of these, scattered cedars gave way to heavy timber.

The touch of fall was already on these northern forests, and the hillsides were gorgeous with bright yellows and occasional reds. The sun, peering over the rim of hills to our left, gave us the general direction of home, at least.

How many impassable swamps, unscalable mountains, and unfordable

streams lay between, I could only conjecture. By climbing one of those hills, it might be that we could form some idea.

But the first step I decided was the question of food and rest. Miss Norcross was in no condition for a long march without both.

The latter was easily obtained, but the former? There were fish, no doubt, in the pond, and game in the forest beyond question; but to capture either without gun or rod was a problem that I racked my brain to solve.

But necessity is a famous sharpener of the wits, and an idea came to me. I turned to Brute Flanagan. He might as well save me unnecessary labor.

"If you will get more wood, I will see what I can do about procuring food," I suggested.

He gave me a sour glance as much as to say, "Get it yourself," but went off in search of it without comment. Presently he returned with great, green limbs that a farmer's boy would know would not burn.

But Brute Flanagan was no farmer's boy. He was the product, or by-product, of an urban civilization. I saw that he would be of little use in the woods. I said nothing, but gathered an armful of dry sticks myself.

When I returned the girl was nursing the smoking fire back to life, and Brute Flanagan sat looking sullenly on. I could never see the two together without symbolizing them as Beauty and the Beast. The girl was bareheaded and her dark tresses shone as though she had but that moment laid down her brush.

The smoke had brought the tears to her eyes, and her exertion color to her cheeks. She seemed some beautiful, healthy child playing with its first bonfire.

I threw dry wood on the fire. The Brute looked indifferently on.

"When are we going to beat it outa here?" he growled.

"That is what we must decide," I answered shortly. I had determined to get along with the fellow without friction if it were possible.

"Not much to decide," he retorted. "Ought to be a trolley or railroad over the hill."

I glanced at the girl. She raised her eyebrows ever so slightly.

"Have you any idea of how many miles we traveled last night?" I asked curiously.

"No," he answered. "Heard you say we were over the lake, but they have trolleys and trains in the Dominion as well as the States, you know."

I shrugged my shoulders. There was little use arguing with such a man. I would state our situation as I saw it, and he could do as it pleased him. I was satisfied that the girl would see the reasonableness of it, at least.

"We were struck by a tornado, as you know, and it blew us out over the lake. How far it carried us I don't know, and it makes very little difference anyway; for it apparently passed us along to a good, stiff gale that kept us going until, as I figure it, we were some hundreds of miles into the Province of Quebec and nearer Hudson Bay or St. James's Bay, at least, than we are to the lake. Here it dropped us."

The girl's eyes, resting on mine as I spoke, had grown more serious as I proceeded, yet I could see that she agreed with me.

"Now," I continued, turning to Flanagan, "if you expect to stroll over the nearest hill and ride home in a parlor-car, I fear you are going to be considerably disappointed."

Brute Flanagan looked sullenly down at the fire.

"Well," he challenged, "since you know so much, what are you going to do about it?"

I overlooked the offensiveness of his tone, knowing that its object anyway was partly to conceal his ignorance.

"In the first place I think we ought not to start to-day, on the lady's account," I answered. "Better to let her rest while you and I go out and get food and look the country over."

I make no attempt to record the man's jargon, not being familiar enough with its low meanings even if I wished to perpetuate it in black and white. I remember now that he broke out in a fit of temper, calling me a wise guy with various embellishments and ending up with a wonderfully phrased question of sarcastic inflection inquiring if I expected to catch bears with our hands and dive after fish.

"Very well," I answered in kind, "walk over the hill and take the next trolley home. Miss Norcross and I will stay here until we have made some preparations for a long journey."

The man's face reddened. His little eyes looked as wicked as those of a charging rhinoceros. I thought he would strike me, but he got himself in hand with a visible effort.

"Say," he snorted, "you seem to be running this thing, don't you? Do you think I am going away and leave the girl alone with you? When I go, she goes, and don't forget that, little Mr. Czar."

The girl went as white as a sheet, as much, I think, with anger as fear.

"I will go—when I please," she said coldly. "And I might add," she continued steadily, "that I think Mr—"

"Manforth," I supplied as she looked at me. I believe it surprised us both a trifle to think that I had not given her my name.

"Mr. Manforth's suggestion a good one. We ought to know where we are going before we leave the car. And I cannot walk very far to-day," she concluded wearily.

Brute Flanagan spat his chagrin.

"Speaking of names," he observed, "my name is Flanagan, and when Flanagan says a thing he means it. Of course, if the lady is tired," he hedged, "that's different. Come on," he commanded me imperiously. "We'll go out and have a look at the country—and ketch a few bears and deers on the way," he added with heavy humor.

In spite of his manner I thought it better not to cross him, particularly in view of the fact that he had agreed to my plan.

I stopped long enough to cut a length of cord from the netting of the balloon, and we set out together toward the hills to the south of the pond. I glanced back as we reached the edge of the forest; the girl was looking forlornly after us.

We had not gone a hundred feet into the woods when there was a whir underfoot and a brace of partridge got up. Flanagan jumped. To one who has not heard it the sound is startling, I admit.

"What kind of birds are those?" he demanded.

"They are partridge," I answered, "and we will have them for lunch."

He grunted his disbelief of this, and I was not so certain myself as my statement indicated. Yet while I had never made a snare, I had destroyed a great many of them.

I now worked nooses in the cord I had brought, and placed the snares in the runway the birds had made at the base of a tall hemlock. Flanagan watched me with little interest and no confidence. It was evident that woodcraft had no appeal for him.

I got to my feet.

"There is no need of our both going in the same direction," I said. "In fact, it would be better to separate. You can keep on and I will make for the hill over there."

I pointed to my right.

"Perhaps one or the other of us will see some sign of civilization—smoke, plowed fields, a clearing in the forest," I added.

Brute Flanagan fastened suspicious eyes on me.

"Hold on a minute," he said. "How do I know you are on the level about this?"

He considered me with the lids almost closing his eyes, an effect, I suppose, which he believed would forestall any attempt at deceit on my part.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

He stared at me a full minute.

"How do I know you won't beat it back and make off with the girl?" he explained at last.

"Your size must save you a great many whippings, first and last, Flanagan," I answered him when I could, because of my anger. "But don't count on it too often."

At this he put back his head and roared with laughter.

"Go to it, little man, go to it," he shouted, his good humor restored at what he considered a jest.

I turned and left him still chuckling. He was a half head taller than I, and nearly a hundred pounds heavier, yet I felt that some day, and that before long, he must be taught a lesson.

I made my way up a steep hillside through a tangle of laurel. Partridge got up continually before me, and more than once I kicked a rabbit out of the bush.

These were primeval forests and the litter of centuries obstructed the way; but at last I gained the summit of the hill I had headed for. By great good fortune a ledge of rocks made it impossible for even the hardy pine to get a foothold here, and I saw before me a wide stretch of country reaching to a far-off range of purple hills.

Slowly I swept the horizon. No gleam of white that might be a farmhouse, no hint of smoke that would indicate a railroad, not even the silver band of a river or a break in the green sea of the forest to hold out a promise of the presence of man, met my eyes.

I thought of the girl, and my heart sank.

Perhaps within range of my vision there were human beings, trappers or hunters or timber-cruisers, but the chance of finding them in such country where there were not even cart-paths was infinitesimally small.

But, I reflected, if I cannot see them, maybe I can make them see me. I would build a fire on this bare ledge where the smoke of it could be seen for miles about. I felt for my matches. I had put them back in the coat Miss Norcross still wore. So I turned back toward the pond more discouraged than ever.

As I neared the spot where I had set my snares I made other and larger ones for rabbits. They were not as succulent as partridge, but were strong in food value.

Arriving at the place where I had set my first snare, I could not find it. That was queer, I thought. Here apparently was the big hemlock that marked it.

There was the runway the birds had made when they alighted and ran beneath the boughs for cover. But the snare was gone.

Then I saw the branch to which I had made it fast. It had been broken off. There must be powerful partridge in these North Woods, I concluded.

And now I come to a portion of this experience that I dislike to dwell upon.

As I arrived at the heavy timber, and only the few cedars lay between me and the pond, I heard the cry of a woman.

Not until that moment, I believe, had I ever known what real fear was. I found myself running for camp before even I could see what was happening. When I did my heart sank.

Flanagan had returned before me. I doubt even if he had gone far on his mission after we had separated. He had caught Miss Norcross by the wrists and was looking down at her with an attempt at a teasing grin on his heavy face. She had drawn away from him as far as she could get, and even at that distance I could see terror in every line of her form. She struggled fiercely to break from his grasp, but with as little effect as if she had been held by clamps of iron.

Even then I realized that the great brute had, after all, some craft about him. He had first made sure by insinuation and threat that I would not return and had returned early himself.

I ran on over the soft moss at top speed, and, to give courage to the girl, forfeited the advantage of surprise and shouted as I ran.

The Brute cast a glance over his shoulder and saw me coming, then he deliberately caught the girl in his arms and kissed her.

I think I went quite mad at this. Had I possessed a particle of sense, had I paused to consider, if not my own interests, those of the girl, I would have stopped there instead of rushing to certain defeat.

I am no pugilist. Beyond a friendly bout now and then with my roommate in college, I had acquired little knowledge of the art.

If I had known more it would have made little difference, for that, I afterward learned, was Brute Flanagan's means of livelihood. He was a prize-fighter.

But I saw red, and ran in on him. He swung at me, and instinctively I ducked. I gave him a backleg, and with the impetus of my charge he went down. It was but adding fuel to the flame.

He was on his feet and at me like an enraged bull. I avoided the weight of his blows at first by dodging or retreating, but one got through to my body at last. It was as if a catapult had struck me. I crumpled to the ground.

Afterward, Elizabeth Norcross told me she thought I was dying. When the air is forcibly ejected from the lungs nature's bellows make some noise in recovering it.

After that terrible blow I remember lying on my back fighting desperately for air and each breath causing great pain. Then this pain was gone, but a swooning weakness prevented me from rising. I saw Brute Flanagan standing over me like a great schoolboy, savagely exultant, but a bit anxious, too, regarding his handiwork.

Next I heard the girl's voice. It seemed far away, but quite distinctly I heard her say:

"You great brute! Go get water."

"Water—nothin'," he sneered sheepishly. "He'll be all right in a minute. Got it in the solar plexus, that's all."

The girl was on her knees now, bending over me. She got an arm under my neck and tried to raise me.

"He'll get over it quicker if you let him lay flat," suggested Flanagan.

The girl threw him a glance full of scorn.

"If you can't help, you might at least get out of the way," she said in cold anger.

Brute Flanagan snorted.

"Got what was comin' to him, that's all," he commented and moved off with a swagger.

IV.

PERHAPS Flanagan knew more about such matters than the girl. There was every reason why he should. At least, she lowered my head and I breathed easier.

My strength came slowly back. I raised myself on an elbow. But for a certain lameness and that I was still so weak that I felt no desire to get to my feet, I seemed none the worse for the encounter.

None the worse! I could not look the girl in the face. Presently, I knew, I would be well again in body, but what of the spirit?

I had been beaten, knocked senseless by another man in the presence of a woman. I had the feeling that some thing had been taken from me that I could never regain.

I could have wept, not because I was hurt in body. The hurt was far deeper than that; I was hurt in pride. If I had known what fear, real fear, was that afternoon, now I knew what shame was—and hate.

It came to me now what this might mean to the girl. Brute Flanagan had established his sovereignty; might was right. Brute force ruled. We were back in the Stone Age.

With the cities, the railroads, the houses, we had left behind also the law. Brute Flanagan was the law.

I heard myself again, telling my classes that intelligence would always win

against brute strength. I thought of the impertinent senior and winced. Fortunate that he could not see me now, I consoled myself.

"Shall I bring you water?"

The girl fluttered anxiously beside me. And still I dared not look her in the face. Her very kindness emphasized my weakness.

"Thanks," I answered, "I will get it myself."

I got slowly to my feet, staggered a trifle at first, and then got a grip on myself, and walked down to the pond's edge. Here I knelt and drank, and then, for the water acted as a tonic, I bathed my battered face.

I turned back toward the fire. Brute Flanagan was kneeling before it. Over it he was roasting a bird on the end of a stick, the partridge I had looked for in vain, I concluded.

How he had succeeded in plucking and dressing it was beyond me. He must have been driven to it by hunger. As I watched he drew it away from the fire and looked it over. Apparently it passed inspection, for he tore a leg from the tender fowl and bit into it ravenously.

Then he walked over to where Elizabeth Norcross sat dejectedly by the car and offered her part of the half-roasted partridge. She shook her head without looking up. He shrugged his great shoulders and proceeded to finish the bird himself. Then he stretched out by the fire for a nap.

Watching him, my courage came back. After all, he was a beast with the brain of a beast. And like a beast, having eaten, he must have his sleep. I could not cope with him in an open fight. Very well, I would make my wits fight for me.

The sight of food had reawakened my appetite, and I felt that it, more than any one thing, would give me back a fair measure of my strength. My first wish, then, was to return to my snares in the hope that one having worked so well the others might.

But this meant leaving Elizabeth Norcross alone with the Brute, which I intended never to do again; or taking her with me—a step I had no doubt would precipitate another quarrel. I decided, too, that a fire must be lighted on some hill-top where it would do some good, and not be hidden as was ours like the biblical light in the bushel of this valley.

This, too, involved leaving the girl; so the first step, after all, must be to secure her safety.

It was obvious that, even in the state of affairs that now prevailed, the girl and I could not start out alone on our return journey. Her condition had certainly not been improved by the excitement of the afternoon, while mine was decidedly worse.

I judged it wise, then, to construct some manner of shelter that would be at once a protection from the weather and from the attentions of the man-brute.

This proved to be no easy task. Without an ax a log hut was out of the question. There were no stones of sufficient size about, had I been able to use them. I reflected in what comparative safety the girl had been, sailing through the heavens in the balloon. And that gave me the idea which I proceeded to carry out—that and the memory of the ancient childhood classic, "Swiss Family Robinson."

I recollected that in that immortal work the Swiss Family took refuge in the top of a mango-tree and gained access to it by means of a rope or fiber ladder. I think I have stated that a solitary oak of immense girth stood at the edge of the pond. From this a giant limb stretched out horizontally a dozen feet above the ground.

There was no such natural resting-place in the tree as in that which the fortunate family took possession of; but we, on the other hand, had brought our house with us.

The car of the balloon, some five feet in diameter, made of willow and purposely light of construction, could be easily

raised and swung from this limb, I decided. Once there, my lady could take refuge in it from two-footed beasts as well as four, if such there were in the vicinity.

I set about to put my plan into effect.

Brute Flanagan, content to let others do the thinking for him, and satisfied, apparently, that after my beating I would make no attempt to start home that day, still slept peacefully by the fire.

Miss Norcross had taken temporary shelter in the overturned car, as if afraid to wander any great distance from the one link that bound her to home and her father.

I walked over to her and told her of my scheme. She brightened at once, both, I think, at the promise it held of temporary security and because it meant action.

I partly lifted the car and saw that I would have no trouble in carrying it or rolling it, at least, to the big oak. Then I examined the deflated bag.

The cords which netted it were brought together and made fast to a wooden ring, called the gathering-ring, to which, in turn, were secured heavier ropes leading up the sides of the car from rings in the bottom of it.

With the help of the deft fingers of the girl, I unwove several of these heavier cables and knotted them together into a line that I could throw over the limb of the oak and hoist my car aloft with. It now remained to construct a rope ladder that Miss Norcross could raise or lower as the occasion required, gain access to her nest, and prevent others from doing so. This I made from the smaller netting of the balloon.

So far so good, but she needed protection from the elements as well, and now I proposed an attack on the balloon fabric itself.

She hesitated at this. It was not a valuable bag, being made of prepared cotton and not of silk, but it was all her father owned, and she still had hopes that it would be possible to leave it intact on the chance that it could be brought out on a pack-horse.

"But then," she said bravely, "here am I, wearing your coat and leaving you without protection from the cold, when this poor balloon, which will probably never be of use again, could furnish us with shelter and clothing."

"Nonsense," I protested. "I was thinking only of you."

"Do you know," she observed gently, her dark eyes on mine, "you usually are thinking only—of me."

I could feel myself reddening at this. The anxiety, the labor, even the beating I had received at the hands of Brute Flanagan, were paid for by these few words.

"It is no more than any man would have done," I murmured confusedly.

She shrugged her shoulders and looked significantly in the direction of the fire where Brute Flanagan still slept.

I followed her glance.

"Let me hang your nest before he awakens," I said.

But before we did that she insisted that we take cloth from the balloon, and with my knife she ripped a length from the top to the bottom of the bag.

The big oak was a hundred yards away, but, as I had anticipated, we had little difficulty in rolling and dragging the car to its foot. I threw a coil of rope over the extended limb and together we swayed on it.

To my great satisfaction, the weight of two of us was sufficient to send the car easily aloft. Once more it swung in its element, well above the reach of the tallest man, the rope ladder dangling underneath. I made the end of the hauling-line fast to the trunk of the oak and started aloft to secure the basket to the limb so that its fastenings could not be reached from the ground.

I had seen circus acrobats climb rope ladders, and it had always appeared to be a perfectly simple feat. I found on experiment that it was anything but that. At last, however, with Miss Norcross

steadying it from below, I gained the edge of the basket and swung myself in.

I lashed the car securely to the limb, drew up the hauling rope which Miss Norcross untied, and slipped down the ladder more easily than I had gone up. The car now hung inaccessible save by means of the ladder, for the tree was of such great girth that even had he the skill Brute Flanagan could not have got his arms about it to climb it.

"Now try it," I said to the girl, proud, I must admit, of my work. She swarmed up the swaying ladder so much more agilely than I that I gave a spontaneous cheer.

Remembering, too late, Brute Flanagan, I looked in the direction of the fire. He was on his feet, stretching his great arms and looking at us.

For the first time I got comfort out of the situation.

"Pull up your ladder and try to get some sleep," I called to the girl. "In an hour I will be back with food."

She nodded brightly down at me. I set out for my snares with a lightheartedness that I would not have believed possible an hour since.

V.

Once in the woods, my first step was to arm myself with a hickory club. If this was the paleolithic age, I must play the part.

Events had proven, and there was no use denying, that man for man I was not the equal of Brute Flanagan. Calmly to submit to further punishment and humiliation rather than protect myself as best I could would be sheer quixotism. I whittled my weapon to the proper balance with all the pride of the aborigine. I even pondered grimly on the comparative degree of hardiness it bore to Brute Flanagan's skill.

Yet it was entirely for purposes of defense, and I had no immediate desire to test it. I thrust it in my belt and went on to my snares.

I had hoped to find another partridge. There is no better eating, to my mind, than this toothsome bird; and I knew that at the best any game that I might find, roasted over an open fire, without salt or gravy, would make an unattractive meal for the girl.

But the partridge snares were empty—had not even been disturbed. The birds had taken warning apparently from the fate of their fellow.

Better luck awaited me at the rabbit traps, however. A poor cottontail had noosed himself and had been his own executioner. I tied him to my belt, for fear Brute Flanagan might find him, and pushed on to the high hill I had climbed in the morning.

The sun was setting as I had reached the bare ledge of rock. I wished the girl were beside me to see it. Even in our predicament she could hardly have failed to be delighted at the soft merging of gold into mystic blue. In this wide wilderness there was something pristine, undefiled, about the sunset.

But there was work to do, and I must get back to camp before dark. First glancing about the horizon in the vain hope of some sign of the presence of man, I then collected a great lot of dry brush and touched it off with the matches I had this time remembered to bring. As it burned I skinned and dressed my rabbit and broiled it over the hot fire.

The woods were in semidarkness when it was done to my satisfaction. I threw more brush on the fire and set out for the pond, half-running, that I might reach it before darkness set in.

As it was I believe I should have wandered from the path but for the flicker of light which I presently saw through the forest. It was the camp-fire by the pond.

I came out into the open to see the figure of Brute Flanagan, exaggerated by the fire to enormous size, piling on great limbs that gave forth more smoke than blaze.

The great oak from which swung the car lay between the fire and myself. I stopped beneath it and called to the girl.

Her head appeared over the rim of the basket.

"Have you slept?" I asked.

"No."

"Why not?"

"I was worried—you were gone so—long. I feared something had happened."

"Bless you," I answered, "you must not worry about me. Lower a cord and I will send up your dinner."

"Really!" she exclaimed. "How good of you."

"My reward shall be your promise to eat it," I said dubiously.

"You need not worry," she answered hungrily. "I could eat it raw—now."

"Good! Are you comfortable?"

"Perfectly."

"Cold?"

"No. And here is your coat. I have been worrying ever since you were gone because you did not have it."

I protested. I did not want the coat. I could get more cotton from the balloon. She ended the argument by dropping the garment on me. So I put it on, and the warmth of it—yes, and the fragrance—affected me strangely.

I wondered if it were such a fearful thing, after all, to have lived in those ancient times. Ah, but there were no such women as this one, I reflected, and—there was still Brute Flanagan.

I tied part of the rabbit to the cord she lowered.

"Would you care to join us at the fire?" I questioned. "I doubt if Flanagan will be offensive when I am about."

"Thank you," she answered, "but I am frightfully sleepy, and so much depends on my condition in the morning—"

"Quite right," I agreed, relieved at her decision.

"Later I will send you up a bundle of leaves for your bed. Good night!"

"Good night," she answered softly. "And—" she hesitated—"you won't get into another fight, will you?"

I did not reply. I had my own ideas about that.

"For my sake?" she pleaded.

"Not unless it is for your sake," I answered and left her.

I went over to the fire. Brute Flanagan sat coughing in the smoke of it, too stupid even to get to the windward of the thing. He did not see me until I stepped into the light of the fire. His little eyes narrowed as he looked up, for I was eating a rabbit leg, and in spite of my fears I found it very savory. I had hidden the rest of the animal against a future need.

Neither of us spoke for a moment; then his eyes rested on the club thrust into my belt.

"All healed, ain't you?" he said with his habitual sneer. "Hung the skirt up out of danger," he went on, "built your little bonfire, and now you come back for more."

Remembering my promise to the girl, I made no answer.

His appetite got the best of him after a while.

"Got any more of that?" he demanded.

I nodded.

"Let's have it," he ordered peremptorily.

"I am saving it."

"Let's have it," he repeated threateningly.

"I am saving it," I echoed.

He got heavily to his feet.

"Have I got to beat you up again?" he questioned, his jaw thrust forward.

I drew the club from my belt and stood my ground.

"Aw—put down your stick and fight like a man," he sneered.

"I will—when I fight with a man," I answered.

"I knew you were yeller," he abused me, and sank back to his former position.

"Now let me tell you something, feller," he went on. "If you had been on the level wit' me, I'd 'a' been on the level wit' you. But what do you do? First you butts in between me and the skirt—and get a good licking. Then you hoists her higher than a kite when I'm hittin'

the hay. So take it from me, if you're looking for fight—it's fight you'll get."

He paused for breath, and then continued: "One thing more. I've climbed higher trees than that big oak, so watch out."

"Thanks," I said. "I will."

I had found out what I wanted. It was to be war. That, after all, was better than an uncertain and treacherous peace.

I went over to the balloon, cut another strip of cotton from it, and filled it with leaves. The girl was waiting as I approached the big oak. I think she must have been watching to see what would happen at the fire.

"Your bed, milady," I called.

She was silent for a moment. I did not know but what my familiarity had offended her, but she called presently:

"There is the cord. I can never thank you enough."

"Have you eaten your rabbit?" I cross-examined.

"Every bit," she answered promptly.

I made fast her line and she drew the bundle of leaves into the car.

"Where will you sleep?" she asked.

"Never fear. I shall be near," I assured her.

"It was not that. I feared he might —do something to you."

"Don't worry about that, either," I answered somewhat boastfully. "In the next encounter I hope to give a better account of myself."

I had already decided, however, that I would leave no step untaken to secure the further safety of the girl. I returned to the balloon after leaving Miss Norcross and got several lengths of rope.

Out of these I made an enormous snare beneath the car. An end of this I fastened to the oak, the other I carried to a depression on the edge of the pond, a hundred feet away, where I proceeded to make my bed of leaves with more balloon cloth for a covering.

This I did with the greatest stealth, glancing from time to time in the direction of the fire to see that Brute Flanagan, who still sat blinking before it like a great owl, was not watching my movements. Then I settled myself for the night. From earliest boyhood had been impressed on me the ignominy of a sentry sleeping at his post. Never until that night had I realized what a perfectly natural thing it was to do this. I had been without sleep the previous night; I had passed a strenuous day full of unaccustomed exertion.

Now as I lay on my soft bed of leaves with the balloon cotton keeping off the chill of the night air, I found it well-nigh a physical impossibility to keep awake, in spite of the danger to the girl and myself of sleep.

Fearful that I might doze off in spite of any will power, I tied the end of the snare line to my wrist.

My next recollection is that of the tremendous jerk that nearly tore my arm from my body. It was a rude awakening, but a thorough one.

I knew at once what had happened, even had I not heard Brute Flanagan from the direction of the car, cursing horribly and prophesying what he would do to me when he caught me.

Prowling about under the car, he had caught a foot in the noose. Believing that I had hidden beneath the tree, he had run in that direction and had been brought up with an abruptness that had thrown him to the ground and nearly maimed me as the line tautened.

"If you are looking for me, I am over here," I called craftily.

He came running toward me with a silence that was more ominous than his threats.

And then he reached the end of the cord with which I had made the noose fast to the tree. I was startled out of my hate and fear of the man at the crash with which he came to earth.

The impact was terrific. For a moment he lay silent, and I thought he was knocked senseless. Then he groaned, or rather grunted with pain, and got slowly up. I felt him fumbling with the ropes

and gave another jerk that pulled his feet out from under him again.

There was one thing I had overlooked. It nearly cost me my life now. As I have stated, I had made the rope fast to my wrist before I went to sleep and had not loosed it. Now I found that two could play at this game.

Hearing nothing more from the fallen gladiator, I rose to my feet, peering in his direction. A tremendous jerk set me running toward him. I braced my feet and tried to stop my progress, but a second pull broke my hold.

I sank to the ground and tried to stay my course, taking advantage of every inequality of the ground, but to no avail. It was the old game of tug of war, and weight counted.

The knot I had tied had jammed by this time so that I could not loosen it. My knife was in a pocket I could not reach with my free hand.

Never, I believe, had man known better the sensation of a well-hooked fish at the end of a stout line. I was being drawn toward as certain death as fish ever was.

And now I was jerked forward, face down, and dragged bodily toward the big brute-man. Something under me prodded me cruelly in the ribs. Instinctively I felt for it, and my hand rested on the club I had thrust into my belt.

And what happened now was crowded into so brief a space that I have difficulty in giving a coherent picture of it. I remember hearing the labored breathing of the Brute as he drew me toward him, followed by his exultant curse as he saw me within his grasp.

Perhaps like other beasts of prey, he had the instinct to play with his victim before destroying it. At least, I felt the rope slacken for a moment, and in that moment got to my feet.

The pressure was renewed with a violence that impelled me to within reach of him. He seized my bound wrist with one hand and grasped for my throat with the other.

I knew that death was in that grasp if it ever got home. With every ounce of my strength I twirled the club and brought it down on his extended wrist.

I did not need his hoarse cry of pain to tell me that I had broken his arm. But even this was not enough for this great fighting brute.

With a quickness that caught me off my guard, his sound hand closed about my throat with fingers of steel. Wildly I struck for his head. There must have been good stuff in that stick of hickory, for Brute Flanagan's great hulk sank inertly to earth and lay there.

When I look back on that night I wonder if civilization is not, after all, the child of the generation and not of the age. I doubt if ever man of the stone age felt more momentary satisfaction over fallen foe than I when I saw Brute Flanagan go down.

I wanted to strut about, to swagger. I had conquered in fair fight Brute Flanagan, hitherto sovereign, in this little world of ours, and I was king. That I had nearly lost my life in doing so made the victory the more glorious. That Brute Flanagan himself might now be dead caused me no compunction—at the time.

The timid, fearful voice of Elizabeth Norcross brought me a new sense of elation. She had seen me crushed and broken by this brute, and now she was to know me as his conqueror.

"Mr. Manforth!" she called.

"It is all right," I answered a trifle unsteadily, for I was exhausted from my struggle. "He won't bother you again."

"Oh!"

I dared to believe that the world of relief in her voice was the result of her knowledge of my safety.

Then the woman came to the fore.

"You haven't—killed him, have you?" she queried in a hushed tone.

I believed I had, and began to feel sorry for it. After all he was a human being. His inert bulk, stretched on the ground, appealed through its very helplessness.

He had deserved punishment, but that

was society's prerogative and not mine. And if it came to a question of that, what after all had been his crime? It was not so much what he had done as what he might do.

"I don't know," I answered. "I hope not."

I heard her making preparations to descend. With growing misgivings I ran to the fire for a burning brand. Returning with this, I looked my man over. He had fallen face downward. With new surprise at his weight, I rolled him over onto his back.

His face was streaked with blood, and I noticed that his right hand lay at an uncouth angle with its forearm. Altogether he was a ghastly sight.

The girl came up behind me, peering fearfully over my shoulder at the fallen giant.

"He is dead," she said in an awed voice.

She drew away from me as though through fear of contamination.

"If he is," I answered somewhat incoherently, "he has himself to thank."

"Do get water," she cried.

I ran down to the pond, recollecting somewhat grimly as I went how, but a few hours before, she had put the same request to Brute Flanagan.

I filled my cap with water and dashed it in the big man's face. Variable human! A minute since I had been happy because I believed I had killed a man. Now I was conscious of a great relief to know that I had not.

Flanagan's great hulk stirred, his eyes opened, he propped himself up on his sound arm, and tried to put the other to his head. The hand dangled hideously. He looked at it in wonder that gave way to furious anger and hate as he saw me.

"Curse your soul!" he swore. "You have broken my arm."

VI.

It seems to be a principle of warfare that after as much injury as possible has been inflicted on the enemy individually, at least, then it is in order to turn about and patch him up. This may not be consistent, but apparently it is natural.

If Brute Flanagan's claws had not been drawn, at least one was broken. And while I had broken it, and in so doing had doubtless saved my life, yet now it seemed quite the thing to do to offer to mend it. But he would have none of me that night. His broken wrist must have pained him cruelly, but I question if defeat did not hurt him more.

Bitterly he scorned my offer to set the bone, and had he accepted it at that time I very much doubt if he could have restrained himself from assaulting me with his sound member. He flung aside, too, the timid offers of the girl, and strode away into the night as if to hide his shame.

Elizabeth Norcross returned to her aerie and I to my bed beside the pond. But not to sleep. I had run the gamut of emotions in the last twenty-four hours and, reflecting, could come to but one conclusion.

This was that, overcome whatever obstacle there may be before one, there is another beyond. Brute Flanagan as a menace no longer confronted me, but Brute Flanagan as a sick man loomed up as a greater burden.

Dawn broke while I lay thinking. The hills loomed higher than ever through the cold mist that rose off the pond. The car hung like a great wasps' nest from the oak with no sign of its occupant. Brute Flanagan sat by the dying fire holding his injured arm with his sound one and rocking to and fro with the pain of it.

I hunted about in the brush and collected pieces of wood that would serve as splints. These I whittled into shape and cut more cord from the balloon to bind them with.

Returning to the fire, I saw Elizabeth Norcross was there before me. She was speaking to Flanagan and he was shaking his head in negation.

As I approached they both looked up at me, Flanagan sullenly and the girl with

an expression that baffled me. There had been a time the evening before when we had seemed to be on terms of mutual trust and regard that had moved me oddly. Yesterday she had been all compassion, sympathy, consideration; now there was an indefinable aloofness about her.

"You must—we must do something for his arm," she said timidly as I joined them.

I marveled at the woman.

What consideration had he had for her weakness, her dependence on him and me; what concern for her sustenance and her escape? None! But now he was hurt and she was a woman. He must be nursed and babied.

"I have splints and will set his arm if he will let me," I offered.

He but glowered at me.

"Please!" said the girl. She even bent over him and rested a hand on the big man's shoulder.

His gaze met hers in wonder and then something gave way in the fellow. His eyes were still those of the brute, but of the tamed brute, the mastiff, say, doglike indeed in expression.

I wondered if Flanagan's spirit had been broken with his arm.

He held this out. Now, without speech, I set it as best I knew how, and although I must have hurt him frightfully with my bungling skill, never so much as a whimper escaped him.

Elizabeth Norcross, who held his hand in place while I bound it, nearly fainted when the operation was at last completed.

This done, I gathered more wood for the fire and brought forth the remains of my rabbit for breakfast. The girl would eat little of this and Flanagan none. For myself I ate but to preserve my strength, for warmed over, half-roasted rabbit is not an ideal breakfast-food.

As I ate I gloomily considered our situation. This had been evil enough to begin with, but into it had been interjected something of human nature, so called, that was as untimely as it was despicable. That had been done away with, and as a result we had on our hands a disabled member of the party who, according to all the canons of surgery, ought to have rest and inaction until his arm knitted.

Under the circumstances I did not see how it would be possible to set out to-day. There was one thing I must do, however, and that was keep up the fire on the hill-top.

I was certain that the girl's father would leave no steps untaken to follow us in our flight, and while I feared it would be many days before he could get within sight of that signal, there was always the possibility of its being seen by others.

After breakfast I invited Miss Norcross to go with me to visit the snares and relight the fire, thinking it would accomplish the double purpose of diverting her mind from the gravity of her situation and at the same time help put her in condition for the long journey home when the time came for that.

She glanced at Flanagan, who was out of hearing at the time.

"Ought he to be left alone?" she queried.

I smiled. Yesterday she feared to be left with him; to-day she feared to leave him.

She must have guessed what was passing in my mind, for she added: "It is different—to-day. He is broken in spirit as well as body."

"Yes, yes," I answered with some impatience. I had not entirely forgotten the humiliation of the previous day. "But did he worry about you or me yesterday?"

She sighed in resignation. I suppose she thought that, being a man, it was impossible for me to see the situation as she did—and it was.

Brute Flanagan looked after us as we set out together, but, so far as I could see, there was little of animosity in his glance. Rather it seemed more of anxiety lest we desert him. I eased his mind by telling him where we were going and assuring him that we would return shortly.

I was very near to happiness that morn-

ing. The sun had come out warmly, driving the mist from the pond. The scent of dew on leaves came fragrantly to the nostrils as we went through the forest.

Fear of Brute Flanagan which, whether I had acknowledged it or not, had been with me, had vanished. Brute force had been subdued, if not by intelligence, at least with the aid of it.

But greatest of all, I had made the discovery that I could be content anywhere, under any circumstances, with Elizabeth Norcross by my side.

From time to time, as we made our way through the forest, I stole a glance at her.

The color had come back into her cheeks with the exercise, her eyes sparkled with a new eagerness and hope. Her lithe body had recovered its resiliency.

Youth had come back to its own, and she swung along beside me as lightly and strongly as if she had slept on her own bed those last two nights and eaten three meals a day.

I caught myself hoping that the vast stretch of country that could be seen from the lookout hill would be as bare of indication of human occupancy this day as it had the day before, and that our signal-fire would fail of its purpose—at least for the present.

I pictured a rescue, the end of this adventure, home-coming, settling down again to the grind of teaching, and last but after all, the one thing that made the thought unbearable, separation from this girl.

No more the sense of her presence through the day, the sight of her slow smile, the dependence of her, the right to plan for her, to provide for her, to fight for her! After all, what was life worth without these?

My day-dreams were dissipated to an extent when we had come to the snares. They were empty. We could not live without food.

How humiliating to reflect on that! All these high hopes, desires, and aspirations at the mercy of the stomach. The girl watched me as I examined my empty lines.

"Poor things! I am almost glad of it. I hate to think that they must die that we may live."

"What of the amiable cow and the gamboling lamb?" I reminded her grimly. I was more worried than I cared that she should know.

"Yes, but out here in the forest, free, where life must be so joyous—to die—"

I glanced up at her with a quick fear at my heart.

What if she were a seeress? Men had died of hunger in this country, I knew.

"Come," I said gruffly. "Let us push on and light our fire."

We made our way up the hillside toward the bare rock at its summit. It had not seemed a difficult climb alone, but the girl's skirts were very much in the way. I aided her over the more difficult places, and at such times the clasp of her hand made me wonder at the skill of the Creator in making woman attractive to man.

I reflected that in such an environment, under such circumstances, it must be a plain woman indeed that would not attract the male of the species.

Was there any wonder then that this girl, endowed with an exquisiteness of form and feature, and greater than that gifted with a frank and open nature and generous heart—was there any wonder that the touch of her hand went to my head like wine?

We stood at last on the bare ledge of the rock. The fire had died out and I collected brush and started another at once. After it was going well I piled on green boughs, for it was smoke and not fire that we needed now. It rose in a thick, unwavering column in the still air.

I glanced back at the girl. She stood, shading her eyes with her hands, slowly circling the horizon. When she had at last completed the circle her arms dropped pathetically to her side.

Her eyes met mine, and there was so much of disappointment, of wistfulness, in them, that almost before I realized what I was doing I had taken her hands.

"You must not worry, dear," I said somewhat huskily, for words would not come easily.

She looked up at me, her eyes full of emotion.

Doubtless it was simple gratitude—response to my sympathy—yet as our eyes lingered—and lingered, I was swept off my feet. I caught her in my arms.

She tried to push away. I bent down and kissed her.

Then I realized the enormity of my offense and released her. Gone were all my high ideals as to the sanctity of a woman's person. Gone, I felt, was the faith I had tried to show her was justified in some men.

I was a second Flanagan. Worse, for Flanagan had made no pretense to the fine ideals of the gentleman. He had been a brute because he had been born and reared a brute; but I had been born and reared a gentleman and had masqueraded as such.

Shame at least I had. I could not look the girl in the face.

"Come," I said bitterly, "let us return to the pond that you may have the protection of Brute Flanagan."

Without speech she followed me back.

The remainder of that day dragged on with leaden heels. Flanagan had some fever, and must be under cover at night, so out of the balloon cotton I made him a very presentable tent, and, while I was about it, one for myself.

I visited the snares hourly, conscious from the pangs of my own hunger what those of the others must be. But the game had grown wary.

With the advent of man they had gone to other and safer haunts. My snares were empty.

I had not dared meet Elizabeth Norcross's eyes that day, much less speak to her. I could not ask forgiveness. The offense was unpardonable.

As night fell again I replenished the fire, and the three of us sat silently about it. Then it came time for her to retire to her nest. She gave me full mete of my punishment, I thought then.

First she asked Flanagan if there was anything she could do to add to his comfort before she retired. He thanked her with awkward humbleness, his eyes those of the worshipful mastiff.

For a moment I felt her eyes on me, but dared not look up from the fire. Then she said, "Good night, gentlemen," and left us.

"Gentlemen!" Flanagan and I! She classed us together. What he was, that I was. No better; no worse.

Perhaps she used the words conventionally; but that could hardly be possible after what had happened.

Why was not "good night" enough? What need of the "gentlemen"?

"Ah, milady," I thought sadly, "have you no mercy?"

"Flanagan," I said, "all men are fools."

"Aye," he answered, and his great voice was husky; "worse than that. And some women are angels."

I looked into the fire and mused. Brute Flanagan had ruled first by right of might. I had deposed him and reigned by virtue of what I had named superior intelligence. Then had come this slender wisp of a woman who had taken us both into camp. Where before we had been the other's subjects, now we were her slaves.

VII.

I NEVER think of our rescue without seeing again the picture of those great woodsmen standing beneath milady's car and gazing up at it with expressions of amazement, the while uttering quaint ejaculations of wonder.

I had slept late beneath my cozy tent, and awakened to hear unfamiliar voices. I peered out to see these simple men of the woods walking slowly about beneath the car, examining it from every angle as if consumed with curiosity as to what

great bird could have taken up its habitat among their forests.

As I sat up and watched them, nearly as surprised as they at the sight of other human beings, Elizabeth Norcross thrust her head above the rim of the basket and stared down at the strangers in sleepy-eyed surprise.

Even this apparition could not make these descendants of the most polite nation on earth forget their manners. They crossed themselves first, it is true, but then they removed their caps, courteous admiration gradually taking the place of their amazement.

They turned at sound of my greeting and responded with a "*bo'-jour.*"

Brute Flanagan came forth from his tent, haggard and flushed with fever. Elizabeth slipped down her swaying ladder, and the three of us gathered about our rescuers.

With the aid of my knowledge of French and their even hazier English vocabulary, we told them of the flight of the balloon, and in turn learned that they were southward bound on a last canoe trip of the season before the streams should freeze. That the river on which they had camped the previous night was but two or three miles away and that it joined a larger stream which was in turn an affluent of the Ottawa.

They had seen our fire the previous night and because of its size and location had given up an hour to investigate before continuing their trip. On such a slender thread hung our rescue and most probably our lives.

But when I spoke to them about our transportation, they looked first at Flanagan, then at one another, and shrugged their shoulders.

They marveled quaintly that a balloon would lift so great a man and doubted if their canoe would hold us all. That, however, was the sole question. Otherwise they were entirely at our service.

There was one advantage at least in our mode of living. There was nothing to pack nor carry.

Elizabeth Norcross threw a last glance at the car that had carried her safely so many miles and later made her so secure a home. I fancied I caught the glint of tears in her eyes as she looked away.

And then we turned our backs on this little valley where such momentous things had happened, at least to me, and set out for the voyageurs' camp.

Following the pace set by these lithe forest men, it soon became apparent that the lack of food had sapped our strength. Flanagan stumbled often, and Miss Norcross grasped a sapling now and then for support. The kind-hearted Canadians, seeing their plight, slackened their gait and helped the two over the steeper parts of the way.

We climbed the hill to the westward of the valley and descended its farther slope. A short distance from the foot of this we came upon a swift running stream on the bank of which was pulled up the voyageurs' canoe.

I realized at once the reason of the woodsmen's doubt as to their ability to carry us all. The light craft seemed hardly large enough to bear its owners. But the sanguine Canadians insisted on the experiment at least.

They launched it, one kneeling in the bow, the other taking his place in the stern. I assisted the girl to a seat in the bottom and turned to Flanagan.

"Get in yourself," he said gruffly.

I stared at him in amazement. He was in continual pain from his arm and half sick with fever, yet he offered me first place.

"Don't be foolish, man," I answered; "we must get you to a doctor as soon as possible." I was genuinely moved at the change in him.

He glanced at the girl. She had gone a bit white, I fancied.

"Mr. Manforth is right," she said in a low voice. "You must have medical treatment at once."

Without further protest he maneuvered his great bulk into the remaining space.

The boatman in the stern glanced at me

and shrugged his shoulders. Every inch of room was taken up in the canoe. More than that, the water was within a few inches of the gunwales.

"You see!" said the Canadian in his broken English. "But we will come back. One day—one night—the railroad. One day—one night—we are back."

I saw. He smiled as though it were a mere trifle—two more nights in the forest while he took the others to the nearest railway and returned for me.

"Have you food to spare?" I asked.

He tossed a hand in gesture of apology and drew a quarter of bacon from the stern of the canoe. With a blow of his hunting-knife he sliced off a generous portion and passed it to me.

Then both voyageurs dipped their paddles.

"*Bon voyage!*" I cried as gaily as I could.

"So-long," condescended Brute Flanagan.

I glanced at Elizabeth Norcross. She had buried her face in her hands. Wonderful woman! She had borne up through it all until her safety was practically assured and then had given in.

Yet, I thought sadly, she might at least have said good-by. If she but knew what it meant to me!

And now a wonderful thing happened. Before the man in the stern could thrust the canoe out from the bank the girl was on her feet and had stepped ashore. The Canadians looked up in surprise.

Flanagan eyed her, open of mouth.

"I shall wait—too," she explained in a low voice.

For a moment I was dumb, then I said:

"You will do nothing of the kind."

She stood with lowered eyes.

"It is too crowded," she protested in so low a voice that I barely caught the words.

"Say," cried Flanagan, trying to get to his feet and nearly upsetting the canoe in the process, "do you think I'm going before you do? Let me out!"

The girl turned to him.

"Please!" she pleaded.

The big man looked from her to me, and back again. An expression, the significance of which I did not realize until later, passed over his features and he settled back in his seat.

"The lady is right. Too big load. Back quick," said the stern paddler.

He shoved away from the bank. Both paddles took the water and the light craft jumped away.

I turned to the girl.

"Why did you do that?"

"I don't know—there was no room."

"That is not the true reason, and you know it."

She was silent.

I was in a quandary. With the advent of our rescuers my sense of the conventions had returned. It did not look so bad, somehow, with the three of us—but she and I, when she might have gone back!

"How could you trust me—after what I did?"

Still she was silent, and then:

"Was that so—awful?" she murmured.

I looked at her in amazement. I could not believe my ears.

There was a smile on her lips.

She was laughing at me, yet there was the tenderest of expressions in her eyes.

"See here," I said almost roughly, "you must know what you are doing before it is too late. If you stay with me now it means—forever."

Again she was silent, her eyes downcast. Then she raised her eyes guilelessly.

"Don't you want me—forever?"

I understood at last. The canoe was disappearing around a bend. I caught the flash of the stern paddler's blade as he waved a last farewell.

We were alone, the woman I loved and who loved me. Yet one who has ridden to a fall forever fears another. Since then she has told me that I was very disappointing. I took a slender hand and kissed it.

The Motive

by Lawrence Perry

Author of "31754," "Where All Clues Led," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS ALREADY PRINTED.

HAROLD FINCH, partner in the young real estate firm of Finch & Preston, makes the acquaintance of Cecil Hamilton at Narragansett Pier. Being in search of a wife with money, he follows her to Southampton, where Preston also turns up and makes a favorable impression on the girl, much to Finch's chagrin, who finally persuades him to quit the field. Learning that there is some mystery in Miss Hamilton's life, and determined to find out its nature, Finch even goes to the length of invading her room at night, where he discovers from documents that if she marries anybody but Swandorf, a man of sixty, she forfeits her fortune. As Finch realizes this direful fact there is a stir from the bed, and by an incautious movement the intruder overturns a table, which comes to the floor with a crash.

CHAPTER IX.

FINCH'S WAY OUT OF IT.

THEN the room reechoed to a piercing scream. Finch, with his hat pulled down, had reached the window and started to climb out when he heard footsteps running along the balcony. There were sounds of feet in the hall, too. Miss Hamilton was still raising her voice in shrill terror. Shut off from escape both by door and window, Finch hesitated only a second; then, leaning down near the floor, he whipped a match from his pocket; striking it, he deliberately applied the flame to the lace curtains, and they went up in a puff.

Finch forthwith sprang to his feet and began to pull at the curtains, shouting at the top of his lungs for assistance. He had one curtain down and was trampling upon it, at the same time jerking at the other when the burly form of a man appeared in the window.

"What's going on in here?" he cried.

"Hurry up!" cried Finch. "Are you all asleep? Get a fire extinguisher." He had the other curtain under his feet now and was stamping vigorously upon it.

The house detective leaped into the room and proceeded to the assistance of the young man. Miss Hamilton meanwhile had arisen and thrown on a dressing-

This story began in the October Argosy.

gown. She switched on the lights and then turned to survey the two men who had invaded her room.

"Mr. Finch!" she exclaimed.

Finch held up two grimy, scorched hands and turned to her, laughing.

"What are you doing here?" she demanded, her eyes beginning to blaze.

The detective started and then glanced from one to the other.

"Him?" he exclaimed, jerking his shoulder in Finch's direction. "Doesn't he belong in here?"

"Why, of course he doesn't," Cecil replied. "I—I—occupy this room alone. I was awakened by a crash and then I saw a flare of light."

"Well, it's rather fortunate for you and for the hotel that I *was* here," said Harold in an injured voice. "I am inclined to think I saved some persons' lives."

"Well"—the detective was peering about the room. "Tell us all about it. Wait a minute, though." He went to the door where several persons were clamoring for admission. "It's all right," he announced, opening the door on a crack. "The young lady had a bad dream. Now all of you go to bed. Everything's all O. K."

Finch faced the man defiantly.

"I was sitting in my room, No. 303, smoking," he began. "Suddenly a gust of smoke floated in. I didn't think anything of it at first; then came another puff. I looked out the window and saw smoke coming from down below. I ran down the fire-escape and found these curtains blazing."

It sounded logical enough, and the detective seemed convinced. The girl, however, looked doubtfully at the two. How could the curtain possibly have caught fire?

"I had nothing in the room that would ignite them," she said.

The detective mumbling that one could never be sure about women, asked her if she was sure about that. She replied by telling him to look for himself. Certainly, there was nothing to give any hint as to the origin of the flames. Finch, of course, had taken care to toss his match out of the window.

"Looks funny," the detective grumbled. "There's certainly no reason for any fire starting. Not that I can see, anyway."

"There's only one reason that I can assign," put in Finch, "and that is a very good one, I think. I noticed this evening as I sat smoking that people in the rooms above had a habit of dropping their cigarette butts down the fire-escape. Now, since all the curtains have been blowing outward this evening, what was to prevent one from landing upon one of these in Miss Hamilton's room?"

"Looks good to me," replied the detective, "But you don't mind waiting a bit while the young lady looks about to see that everything is all right."

The detective barred his exit.

"Why not at all if she mistrusts me," Finch said.

She gestured her confidence in him, adding that far from being suspicious she felt that she owed the young man a debt of gratitude.

"You came to the rescue gallantly, Mr. Finch," she smiled. "I am sure that everything is all right, and that you have done me and the hotel a service."

"Just the same," insisted the detective, "you might look around."

"See here," stormed Finch, "Miss Hamilton and I are friends. I object to your placing me in this position. Of course, I don't mind having her do what you say; it is only the principle of the thing."

"I get you." The detective grinned. "But I was raised in the New York police force and am trained not to overlook any bets. So, if it's all the same to you, we'll forget about the principle of the thing and have the young woman do as I say. It won't take a minute. Go ahead, lady."

Thus adjured, the girl moved to the bureau. She opened a drawer and drew out her purse, laying it to one side.

"If you had any money in it," suggested the detective, "you might count it."

She drew out bills of various denominations and ran over them carelessly, turning to say that they were all there.

"Now your jewelry," the man went on.

She followed his instructions and then went hastily through the various drawers. Then she looked about the bureau, finally picking up the trunk key.

Her eyes flashed to the trunk. The lid was down, the lock in place.

"There is absolutely nothing missing or out of the way," she said, "except that I find this trunk key out of place. I thought I put it in the lower drawer last night. Why, here," she added, "are other keys, lying all about the bureau. I am quite sure I put them all away before retiring."

The detective, to Finch's great relief, laughed heartily.

"That's what they all say, miss," he chuckled. "Probably you left the keys out yourself. Anyway, what would any one want with keys when all that money was lying around loose."

He glanced at Finch.

"I reckon I'll give your friend a vote of thanks—and we'll go to bed. Good night."

As Finch followed the detective to the door, the girl advanced to him.

"Mr. Finch, I wish to thank you," she said. "You have indeed placed me in your debt. I hope I can repay you some time."

"Perhaps you can." Finch nodded genially.

For a long time after he had gone Cecil Hamilton sat in the darkness thinking, a frown gradually settling upon her face. Finally as she lay down she spoke half audibly.

"Now what in the world was that man doing in my room? What rascality was he up to? Or was he really my benefactor?"

She went to asleep with the determination to ascertain one way or another, believing that Finch's future actions might throw light upon his behavior of the evening. And she was right.

CHAPTER X.

RUSHING MATTERS.

FINCH went to bed rather unnerved over his narrow escape and considerably ill-at-ease over what he had learned concerning Miss Hamilton's status with regard to matrimony.

He would, of course, continue his efforts to win her affection, because—well, because men of sixty years old have a habit of contracting diseases, and, if anything were to happen to Swandorf, why, it would be just as well for him to be in the proper strategic position.

On the whole the risk he had taken was worth while; he felt rather clever about it. Had it not been for his stupidity in making an unnecessary racket he would have escaped without a bit of trouble. As it was, he no doubt would receive thanks from the hotel management and had earned Cecil Hamilton's gratitude.

These results, and his solving of the mystery which surrounded the girl, had fully repaid him for everything.

When he went down for breakfast in the morning Miss Hamilton was already at table. She beckoned him to her.

"Good morning, Mr. Finch," she said, "can you not breakfast at my table?"

Finch assured her that nothing would give him greater pleasure. He sat down with a smile, asking her if she were any the worse for her experience of the night. As a matter of fact she was not.

She made him feel that he had indeed saved her life, and that through this he had aroused in her the most grateful emotions.

"Oh, it was nothing at all," he assured her. "If the room had been filled with flames and I had had the opportunity of really saving you from peril at the risk of my life, that would have been something really worth while. As it was—"

He shrugged and began to attack an iced melon.

"I must go and pack now," she said as they rose from the table. "I have decided to go to town this morning."

Finch looked at her in surprise and then recalling the tip on Aluminum Preferred and the money in his pocket, he decided that the city would be the best place for him, too.

But, much as he would have loved to do so, he was unable to summon his courage to the point of saying that he would accompany her. For, not knowing that she had intended to depart, he had said nothing of going himself, and, in fact, had intimated several times in the course of breakfast that he did not know just when he would leave for the city. So now, having placed himself on record he could not gracefully retreat.

But now that his wits were being sharpened by the grindstone of deceitful practises, Finch was not long in hitting upon an expedient that would enable him to go with her to town.

He waited by the desk with his bag packed until she appeared with her maid and then advanced hurriedly, smiling as though over the receipt of good news. In his hand he held a telegram.

"What luck, Miss Hamilton!" he cried. "I have just received word from Jack that he needs my assistance in closing with an important prospect. So, if you don't mind I'll accompany you."

"Not in the least," she smiled.

She had rather enjoyed toying with this bungling young man, who fancying that he was utterly misleading her, had in fact held most of his cards so that she could see them. She did not know the game he was playing, not in its details at least, but she did know what the stakes were.

She was supremely interested in allowing him to dangle, if only for the pleasure of hearing him lie and of speculating what his next move would be.

The trouble with Cecil Hamilton was that she underestimated Harold Finch, held him too lightly. For say what one will concerning him, he was a man of strong personality and he actually did hold a certain power over women which many of her sex had come to realize only too well.

If Cecil had but known it, her willingness to dally with him, instead of sending him packing, indicated that already he had established a certain sort of influence with her.

As the train neared the East River tube he edged toward her so that their arms touched with the sway of the car.

"Miss Hamilton," said he, "we are shortly going to part." He spoke as though the separation were to be forever. "I want you to know that the hours I have spent with you have inspired me—I shall return to business with renewed ardor, and soon"—he paused significantly before adding: "I hope you think well of me, Cecil."

This was too much. She raised her head swiftly.

"Cecil?" she repeated. "Oh, I see you were addressing me by my given name. I know you'll pardon me, Mr. Finch, when I ask if you will please not do that."

Finch smiled.

"Cecil is a wonderful name," he said, gazing into her face with brown eyes that had grown hard and metallic. "I like it, like to pronounce it. I don't know that I'll be able to do as you ask. But of course I'll try—Cecil—" He snapped his fingers. "There I go again!"

He laughed, and she, in spite of herself, laughed too.

At the station, in response to his request for permission to call, she nodded and almost threw herself into a taxicab, literally pushing him back as he tried to enter.

"No! No!" Her voice rose in fierce intensity. "I wish to go home alone."

Undoubtedly, from sheer nervousness, she would have screamed had he persisted in his attempt to join her in the vehicle, so with a pleasant smile he stepped back and raised his hat.

An hour later her maid entered the

room with a great box of roses. Attached to them was Finch's card.

"In memory of a *wonderful* time," it read. Cecil flushed vividly and handed the maid the beautiful, long-stemmed flowers.

"Mimi," she said, "if you'll look out of the window you'll see some children playing on the street below. Throw these to them."

CHAPTER XI.

PRESTON FREES HIS MIND.

FINCH, meanwhile, betook himself to the office of a broker whom he knew and made some inquiries about Aluminum Preferred. The broker had heard of no impending movement, and he was curious as to the reasons for Finch's pointed questions.

"Why, have you heard anything interesting, Finch?" he asked.

"No, Arnold, nothing particularly. I made a little turn over in business the other day and thought I'd soak a bit in some good investment. I've been studying the market, and Aluminum has had a healthy look all along."

"Yes, that's true," agreed Arnold; "quiet, safe, conservative. It's certainly all right for investment. But I thought maybe you were in for a plunge on margin or something of the sort."

"By the way," asked Finch, "do you happen to know whether a man named Swandorf — Benjamin Swandorf — is interested particularly in that stock?"

"Swandorf?" Arnold repeated. "I don't know. Wait a minute." He took down a heavy volume labeled "Directory of Directors" and turned over the pages. "Swandorf," he muttered. Suddenly he looked up. "Finch," he said, "what is this you are driving at? Put me next, will you?"

"Why, what do you mean?" Finch advanced to the broker's chair, glancing down over his shoulder.

"Here, don't you see?" Arnold's finger ran along the paragraph of information opposite Swandorf's name. "He's the vice-president of the Aluminum United Products Company."

Finch's face lost interest.

"I see," he said carelessly. "He was looking into some property I have in hand." He turned to the door and then suddenly swinging about upon his heel he came back to Arnold.

"I guess, after all," he said, "that I'll stick up about $800 on margin. Let's see: that will give me eight points leeway—"

"Eight points, less the quarter commission," smiled the broker. "In other words if it goes down seven and three-quarter points you're wiped out."

"Yes, and if it goes up eight points I get the seven and three-quarters profit," interposed Finch. "I understand. All right, go to it."

He pulled a large roll of bills from his pocket and laid $800 on Arnold's desk.

"I'll call you up if I want to close out." He took the receipt and left the office.

When he swung out on Wall Street he realized for the first time how warm it was. His collar had begun to wilt and perspiration was running from his forehead.

Entering his office, fairly fagged, he beheld the enlivening spectacle of Preston, his feet upon his desk, an electric fan working under full headway and a pitcher of lemonade near at hand.

"Hello, Hal." Preston smiled feebly and waved his hand toward the lemonade pitcher. "Have a drink."

Finch, angry as he was, had no idea of ignoring the invitation. He advanced to the pitcher and gulped down a glassful of the cooling fluid and then filling the glass again proceeded to drink in a more leisurely manner.

"I thought," he said at length, "you were coming back to the city to attend to some business! You're giving a fine imitation of a busy man, believe me," he added. "I tell you this: had I believed

your fine sentiments when you left Southampton I wouldn't have come back so soon. As it was I had a picture of you this way, all the time."

"Wrong, my boy; you do me an injustice," returned Preston. "As a matter of fact, you see me resting after an extremely arduous morning. I collected interest on three mortgages and it looks as though I had that Belle Avon prospect on the skids."

"All right." Finch turned grudgingly to his desk, and presently bounced up from his chair and came over to Preston's side.

"Preston," he said, "here's this note of Renault's. It's due day after tomorrow. We can't meet it. Run down and see him, will you, and get a three months' extension. He always seemed to like you. Go ahead. In the mean time I'll see if I can get old man Squires to take up that option we hold on that Twenty-Third Street property. If I can put it over we'll be on Easy Street."

Preston, true to his new resolution, arose without grumbling and put on his hat.

"I don't know about Renault," he said. "I don't think he's particularly stuck on doing us any favors. However, I'll see."

"All right." Finch, seated at the telephone, nodded, and then gave Squire & Company's number as Preston left the office.

Finch had no difficulty in getting into communication with Amos Squires and was delighted to find that the man was in an amiable mood.

"I have looked over the property quite carefully," he told Finch, "and if everything is all right I think I can put it to good use. Yes, I mean I'll take it, provided, of course, my lawyers give their sanction. You might send the papers down to them at once, as I'm rather anxious to close the matter. The lawyers are Redmond & Redmond at 50 William Street."

Finch's tongue was tipped with honey. Oh, of course, he would send the papers down at once, and he was quite certain that no flaw would be found as he had studied the property very carefully in the original instance. Ringing off, he bundled up the documents carefully, tied them with tape, and summoned a messenger boy.

With the papers on their way, Finch got Redmond & Redmond on the telephone.

"I am sending the papers in the matter of the West Twenty-Third Street property option matter for you to look over, at the request of Amos Squires," he told them. "Do you suppose you could give me an answer on them to-day, as I have another party who is interested?"

He was assured that the papers would receive immediate attention. Mr. Squires had requested it and they did not believe that the process would consume more than three hours, provided everything was clear and straight.

"Oh, I'm sure you'll find no difficulty at all," chirruped Finch, who then hung up the receiver and chuckled delightedly.

If this thing could be swung it would be a big piece of business, and while Preston did not know it, Finch had arranged details in such a way that Preston's percentage would be considerably less than his own. If, with the deal completed, Preston wished to protest, why, Finch did not care. Yet Finch had come in contact with Squires through Preston.

He leaned back in his chair, quite content to remain inactive until the lawyers had given an opinion, which he had no doubt would be favorable. And in the meantime Preston had gone down to the offices of the private banker, Jacques Renault, to obtain grace upon the three months' note.

The banker received him courteously. He had always liked the young man, a fact, indeed, which had induced him to discount the firm's note. But he was not inclined to grant Preston's request.

"It is not on your account, Mr. Pres-

ton, that I say this," the banker smiled. "But I have been looking into some of the actions of your partner and I find that he sails altogether too close to the wind to suit me. Some of his practises of which I have heard are, well, rather sharp. I shall feel better when my money is out of his hands. And you, Mr. Preston—I knew your father—and I advise you to establish a more healthful business association. You are now making your way and your reputation, as it is now established, will cling to you always."

"I am sorry you feel that way, Mr. Renault," replied Preston — who as a matter of fact agreed absolutely with the banker. "Finch is a hard worker, a great deal more active than I have been, I'm afraid. I am trying to mend that."

"Do so," the banker advised. "And be assured I am as friendly toward you as I can be. Yet, at the same time, I think the most wholesome lesson you both could have would be the necessity of meeting my note when it falls due."

"You see," Preston protested, "we employed that money in getting temporary control of some property on West Twenty-Third Street. It is a good proposition and we expect to make a handsome turn-over. In fact, Mr. Renault, we hope that Amos Squires will take the option to-day. We have every reason to count upon it."

"Then why do you wish me to renew your note?" asked Renault, eying Preston keenly.

Preston hesitated, flushed, and stammered.

"Mr. Renault," he confessed, "I'm hanged if I know. Finch told me to come around—and I did."

"I see," was Renault's dry comment. "Well, you tell Mr. Finch for me that I decline to grant the extension. And as for you, Mr. Preston, I most earnestly advise you to make certain of everything that you do in connection with your firm. Don't take Mr. Finch's commands and suggestions quite so much as a matter of implicit faith. I'm sure you'll thank me some day for this advice — if you follow it."

Preston was rather inclined to agree with the banker, but, of course, he did not say so. He merely nodded, thanked the man and took his departure.

He was in no hurry to go back to the office, because Finch's feverish mood would not be reduced appreciably by the adverse news from Renault's banking house. And it was rather hot, Preston decided, to be obliged to sit and watch his partner gyrate angrily about the place.

Therefore, he decided to delay the unpleasant experience for at least an hour or two, and in the mean time to fortify himself with a cool luncheon.

He got into the subway and stewed in the steaming atmosphere to Thirty-Third Street. He found the interior of the hostelry cool and tranquil and was about to sit down at a table by the door, where the breeze was filtering in, when he was touched on the shoulder by a waiter.

"There is a young lady trying to get your attention," he said. Preston looked around and saw Cecil Hamilton. She was nodding and smiling cordially. Preston hurried to her table, and upon her invitation sat down.

"I had been hoping to see you," she said. "I was on the point of calling you up several times. What luck to have you drop in here?"

Preston, saying that it was luck indeed, for him, studied the menu card and ordered a repast nicely calculated to refresh as well as to nourish. Then he gave his attention to the radiant being opposite him.

"You say you were going to call me up?" he asked. "Was there anything in particular you wished to see me about?"

"Why, yes," she replied, "and yet I hardly know how to begin, or what to tell you. You, of course, are a friend of Mr. Finch's—"

"I am a business associate," Preston replied slowly. "I wish you would mark the distinction—a business associate. As to my friends," he added slowly, "I am rather inclined to be a bit particular."

She eyed him curiously, and then, as though satisfied, her face lighted up.

"And yet," she said, "you would not be his business partner if you did not trust him absolutely?"

This was put in the form of a question. She paused, as though waiting for an answer.

Preston did not give it immediately. He frowned and seemed to be considering her words. At length he looked up.

"I don't know what to say. It is not my habit to attack any one. Much less is it easy for me to speak my mind concerning a person when that person happens to be the friend of a girl with whom I am friendly."

As she started to speak he raised his hand.

"Just one moment; I hope you will believe what I have said. But on the other hand there are occasions when—"

He paused.

"When not to speak is merely false loyalty," she prompted him.

"Well, you might say that. For example, I might say something about Finch, and you would have every right to attribute my words to a desire to hurt him in your eyes—advancing my interests by pulling him down."

"No, I would not." She shook her head emphatically. "I know exactly how you feel. But you must remember, I have asked you to speak."

"No you haven't," Preston denied, "not in so many words at least, but just the same I am going to tell you this: look out that you do not get too deeply involved with Harold Finch. There's something loose about him, something wrong somewhere. He wasn't always so, but he has a perfect passion for making money, and I'm beginning to believe that he has got to a stage where he does not care how he makes it."

Preston settled back in his chair.

"I wouldn't tell you this unless I were interested in you," he resumed.

"But I am and above all things I wish to see you happy. I don't think Hal could ever make you so; in fact, quite the contrary."

She studied his good-natured face with its stanch gray eyes. Then she leaned forward, speaking in a low voice.

"I am going to tell you something, Mr. Preston, and ask your advice. I have been a little bit worried all morning."

She then proceeded to relate the incidents of the previous evening, the fire, the ride to the city in the train and all that went with it. When she had concluded she sat back.

"Now what do you think of it all, Mr. Preston, and what shall I do? What is he trying to do, and why is he so interested in my affairs?"

"He wants to marry you, because you have money," replied Preston bluntly. "And if you don't look out he will."

Her eyes flashed.

"Oh, no, he won't," she cried. "I am not quite so weak as all that. And anyway there are reasons—"

She bit her lips and ceased speaking abruptly.

"You have never asked me for the privilege, Mr. Preston," she went on after a second, "but any time you care to I should love to have you call."

Preston showed that he appreciated her invitation, and after some desultory conversation they arose from the table, the girl going to a woman's club to which she belonged and Preston making his way to the office.

He found Finch seated like a statue at his desk, waiting for word from Squires's lawyers. He got up eagerly as Preston entered.

"Well, what did old Renault say? Is it all right?"

"No, it isn't," Preston returned. "Renault won't give us a minute overtime. He says we need a lesson in

rigorous business methods and that we must meet the note—or he'll call it."

"Oh, he will, eh—the old—" Finch broke into a volley of curses. "He'll teach us rigorous business, will he? Well, when we get this Squires matter fixed I'll go down there and shove the money down his throat, the old hypocritical fool. Teach me rigorous business—"

"Us," corrected Preston.

"Us! Yes!" Finch glared at his partner. "He judges the firm by you. I'll bet you made a sorry bid to have him do the decent thing. I suppose you started by trying to borrow five dollars."

"I started all right, Finch," replied Preston crisply. "Now cut out this abuse of your beloved partner, or I'll be tempted to get real angry, hot as it is."

Many of Preston's grimmest remarks were thus couched in the guise of lightness, and Finch reverted to Renault.

"Why the deuce were you so long about it?" he finally asked. "You've been gone more than two hours. Did it take you all that time to get thrown out of his office?"

"Why, no," Preston confessed. "I went to lunch at the Waldorf, and ran into Miss Hamilton."

"And you had luncheon together," sneered Finch. "What did you talk about?" he asked as Preston nodded.

"Look here, Finch," Preston got up from his chair and strode up close to his partner, "that's none of your damned business. Do you understand?"

Finch leaned back in his chair and burst into laughter.

"Oh," he said, "so it's that way. Well, my boy, go ahead. Plunge into it. I'm too busy just now to compete with you."

"What do you mean by compete?" snapped Preston.

"Why, you want to marry the girl, don't you?" retorted Finch. "But if I were you I should center my attentions elsewhere. Miss Hamilton, in good time, is going to marry me. And in her heart she knows it."

And even Preston felt something of a strange magnetic quality that gleamed from the other's eyes.

CHAPTER XII.

TRYING TO RETRIEVE A BREAK.

BEFORE Preston could reply the telephone bell rang. He arose to answer the call and found that it was for Finch.

He set the receiver down and nodded at his partner.

Finch picked up the receiver and spoke in an eager voice.

"Yes, this is Mr. Finch. Oh, yes, Mr. Redmond, how do you—what? I didn't catch that—what did you say?"

Preston took up a duplicate telephone which connected through on the same wire and thus caught the conversation of both parties.

"Mr. Finch," said the voice, "we have decided after careful examination that we cannot advise our client, Mr. Squires, to take up your option."

"You have!" Finch's voice trembled with suppressed anger. "Why have you done that?"

"Principally," was the reply, "because the Title Guarantee & Trust Company have informed us that they would decline to insure the title. It is not a title at present that is perfect, they say."

"But," Finch's voice broke in irritably, "the courts will easily remove that slight cloud."

"Well, perhaps so," said the lawyer, "and I might suggest that this is what you yourself should have attended to."

"What's the matter with doing it now?" demanded Finch.

"Because," was the response, "it is a process that might require a year or two, and in that time there is no telling what exigencies might arise. Mr. Squires wanted the property for immediate use. His plans in all probability will be of different character within the next few months."

As Finch could not seem to find words for a reply the voice went on.

"We are sending the papers back to you and we are mailing a letter under separate cover giving you our precise reasons for not permitting our client to enter upon this matter."

"All right." Finch slammed the receiver back on the hook and regarded Preston with black countenance.

"Dished again!" he vociferated. "By heavens, will anything ever go right?"

"You knew about the cloud on the title," Preston reminded him. "I didn't like the idea of taking the option at all. You insisted. Now you see the results."

"Oh, you!" Finch's voice rose to a shout. "Well, what do you propose?"

"Why, I suggest that we send the option to Benjamin Swandorf—"

"Swandorf!" Finch glared at the other man. "Swandorf. What do you know about him?"

"Nothing," was the reply, "excepting that he took one little option from us two years ago, and seems to be in the business of putting life into defunct properties."

Finch paused, thinking, and eventually nodded.

"Why, Jack," he agreed at length, "there may be something in that. Don't you remember he tried to take over the Fifty-Seventh Street block the other day. He might be the very chap."

"He isn't strong on lawyers," Preston explained. "He always takes care of himself, and as long as a title's really good he doesn't seem to care a hang about slight flaws. He lets the other people see the lawyers. And he's proved himself right, as to that, more than once."

"That's all so," admitted Finch. "But he doesn't pay fancy prices for anything. Still, I don't know that we're in any situation to haggle over terms. By George! I'll call him up."

He did so and after getting Swandorf on the wire learned that this man, whose letter to Cecil Hamilton, Finch had read, was quite ready to be interested.

"I know the property very well," he said, "and I think I could use it for something I have in mind, if everything is satisfactory. Say you send the papers right down to me."

Finch said that he would and skipped lightly from the telephone, chuckling genially.

"It looks like ripe fruit, ready to fall," he said, slapping Preston on the back. "I am particularly anxious to get this thing across, because—because—"

He shut his lips suddenly. There was no reason why Preston should know of the relations between Miss Hamilton and this man, Swandorf.

"Jack," he said, "call up Redmond & Redmond, will you? And ask them to send those papers up by messenger."

Preston, doing as he was bid, learned that the documents were already on their way. There was nothing, as a consequence, to do but wait. This they did, Finch rather restlessly.

He saved time by summoning a messenger boy, and the little Mercury in blue and brass was waiting when the man from Redmond & Redmond's office appeared.

Finch glanced at the envelope. It was the same envelope he had enclosed with the return address of Finch & Preston. He pasted a square of paper containing the name and address of Benjamin Swandorf upon the face of it and handed it to the messenger, together with a dollar bill.

"Boy," he said, "I want you to burn the paths with this. Get it to Mr. Swandorf in jig time—and everything you can save out of the dollar is yours. Now then, off you go."

The boy grinned and the next instant was clattering out of the office and away on his errand with the speed of a young mustang.

"I sort of have a feeling," remarked Finch, throwing himself into his chair, "that this is a case where we put it over. Swandorf has been pretty active in real estate of late. If he takes this

option it would put the firm of Preston & Finch on Easy Street for a year or two."

Preston, who had become quite as interested in the proceedings as his partner, agreed with him heartily.

"What do you know about Swandorf?" Finch asked suddenly. "I mean personally."

"Personally, nothing," Preston rubbed his nose reflectively, "except that he's rather an old sport from all I hear. I have seen him dancing at Sherry's."

"Yes, and you've seen other staid business men dancing there, too," grimaced Finch. "That doesn't mean anything. He—he doesn't impress you as the sort of a man who would impress the average young woman, say Miss Hamilton?"

Preston laughed, asking Finch to study that question himself and see how foolish it appeared upon analysis.

"But why do you ask?" Preston added.

"Oh, I don't know. I—" The telephone bell interrupted him, and Preston answered it. He spoke for a few seconds, saying, "Thank you, very good of you to let us know," then hung up, and resumed his seat.

"What did Redmond want?" asked Finch.

"Why," said Preston, "he wanted to let us know that by mistake his clerk had enclosed the letter to us in the papers he returned, and—"

An interruption came in the shape of a roar from Finch, who bounded from his chair and faced Preston tragically.

"Well, what now?" asked the latter.

"What now!" Finch regarded him as a pedagogue might face down a stupid child. "What now! Why, you fool, don't you see that if Swandorf gets hold of that letter showing why Redmond & Redmond wouldn't permit Squires to take that option he'll kick over the traces, too. If he sees the thing the fat's in the fire for sure."

He seized his hat.

"Come on, Preston, we've got to get that letter before he has time to read it. It means everything."

Preston, whose mind had been elsewhere, could easily see the truth of this statement and he became hardly less excited than his partner. He snatched his hat from the top of the desk and ran out into the hall in the wake of the fleeing Finch.

An empty taxicab was passing as the two men reached the sidewalk, and Finch hailed it, ordering the man to break the speed laws to Forty-Second Street. The cabman did not do this, but he got the pair to the offices of Swandorf & Co. in good time.

They dashed up the stairs and presented their cards to a stenographer.

"I don't think Mr. Swandorf is in," she said. "But I'll see."

She plugged in at the little switchboard and shortly reported that the man they sought had gone for the day.

"Is his secretary in?" asked Finch. "I should like to see some one who could speak for him. I am Mr. Finch of Finch & Preston."

The girl nodded, spoke over the phone and in a few minutes Swandorf's secretary, a young woman, was standing before them.

"Mr. Swandorf has gone to his summer home at Larchmont," she said. "He took your papers with him, Mr. Finch. I know that because he instructed me to place them in his portfolio."

"You don't know whether or not he looked at them," inquired Finch, with an affectation of indifference.

"I know he did not," smiled the capable young woman, whose eye-glasses glittered professionally. "He was hurrying to get away and when your papers came he simply tossed them to me with the request to see that they were placed in his bag. That means, of course, he will study them over the week-end."

"I see," Finch nodded. "I thank you very much." He turned to the door. "Come on Preston."

When they were outside Finch seized him by the arm.

"Jack, we've got to take the first train for Larchmont. Swandorf must not see that letter under any consideration. I wonder how we can get it back."

Quite consistently with his recent trend of thought and action he began to plot stealthy measures by which the package could be recovered before their holder could examine its contents.

"Why not go to him simply and ask for them?" queried Preston. "There's no need to do a moving-picture stunt, is there? Just say we enclosed some private papers and—and—" Preston paused. "By George!" he cried. "What was to prevent him from reading them on the train?"

"Nothing," replied Finch, "only business men are not likely to work on a train, and besides, Swandorf wasn't on a train. He always goes to and from Larchmont in his motor-car."

"I guess you're right," Preston agreed. Finch glanced at him sharply. If ever a young man's wits had appeared to be off wool-gathering, Preston's had since his return from luncheon.

"What did you have to eat?" growled his partner. "You act as though you'd been smoking opium. Wake up and get into this thing. This is no time for fooling."

"Right-o," laughed Preston, who felt the justice of the rebuke. "I don't know what has made me so deuced stupid. Well, come on."

They swung into the Grand Central Station and found that a train left for Larchmont on the hour. It was then well after three o'clock. They purchased their tickets and sat in the smoking-room, reading news of the hot wave and of various affairs of the world until it was time to board the cars.

Finch's mind was busy with thoughts of Swandorf and his connection with Miss Hamilton. Although his relations with the man had always been cordial he had now come to detest him as the person who stood in the way of his plans concerning the girl.

He fell silent as the train sped into Westchester County, and when New Rochelle was reached he jumped up suddenly, as though having arrived at some sort of a decision.

"Come on, Jack," he cried. "We'll get off here. I've thought of a scheme.

Preston arose protestingly.

"This isn't Larchmont," he said. "Why do we get off here? I thought you were in such a hurry."

"Never mind," retorted Finch impatiently. "Come along and I'll explain afterward."

He led the way out of the car and dropped to the station platform. From here he hurried to a garage, Preston following, wonderingly.

"We want a car for a day or two," Finch said to the proprietor, "a fast one."

"Do you want a chauffeur?" asked the man, at which Finch shook his head, saying that both he and Preston held licenses. He produced his State certificate.

The proprietor led them to a lean, gray automobile evidently possessed of an enormously powerful engine, saying that this was qualified to pass almost anything they were likely to encounter. Preston, who had examined it, critically agreed with the man.

Before letting it go he insisted upon a substantial advance payment and demanded that they give him the name of some one in the city whom he could call upon for reference. Preston gave him a list of names, and after the proprietor had spoken to one or two of them on the telephone he expressed his willingness to let them have the car.

"Doing business with you is worse than having a check cashed," complained Finch.

The man smiled and rubbed his hands, saying that the game of hiring a motor-car and never coming back with it was very popular in the region, and that with him it was always a question of "safety first."

"All right." Finch got in and took the wheel, while Preston cranked the machine. In another minute they were rolling out onto the street.

"I don't quite get all this," said Preston. "What do we want of a motor-car, when by staying on the train we would have been in Larchmont by this time."

"Still thick!" grimaced Finch. "Don't you realize that if we were to appear to have hurried to his home by train he would suspect that something was fishy with the deal, whereas if we just happen to drop in while we are motoring—wait a moment."

He stopped the car abruptly in front of a house which set well back from the winding roadway. The lawn was covered with trees, the residence being but partially visible through the foliage.

By the roadside stood a small motor-car, the property evidently of a tradesman of some sort. Finch ran his car close alongside, and then after a glance up and down the lonely road, proceeded to remove from the smaller car its two license-tags.

"Now, what in thunder are you doing?" asked Preston. "Don't you know that's stealing?"

"We are going to do some record-breaking riding before we get through," Finch explained. "Swandorf is probably motoring this fine afternoon, and we may have to overtake him. I am simply going to exchange the license-plates. Again, there is a great deal of property in this region that I've been wanting to look over, and to make any time we'll have to move fast. If we have another man's number, he, and not we, will be summoned to court. See?"

"Hal, are you crazy?" Preston regarded his companion curiously. "You have been talking about seeing Swandorf in a hurry, and now you gibber about running around the country to look at property. What's the idea? I'm curious."

"Oh, I mean we'll look over property after we've seen Swandorf," replied Finch.

"Well, you'll go alone if you change those license-plates," declared Preston. "I'm going to ride straight or not at all."

"Oh, all right, if you feel that way." Finch, who had partially unfastened the rear tag, readjusted it, then seizing a chisel which he had taken out of his tool kit he bent down over his own rear tag.

"Since the 1916 numbers have been peeling off so," he said, "we might as well assist nature." One or two sharp blows of the chisel utterly defaced the plate so that the number was not recognizable.

Preston got out to see what he was doing just as Finch completed his work upon the front tag. He objected strenuously, but the harm was already done, and Finch was very eloquent in his explanation.

"The numbers, as you know, have been chipping off—thousands have been turned in to the Secretary of State. The tags on this car have begun to show wear, and what harm will it do to complete the work? All that the cops can do is to order us to get new tags. Don't you remember that taxicab we were in the other day?"

Preston returned to his seat, shaking his head. He thought that Finch's explanation of his action was extremely inadequate, but at the same time he remembered Finch's love of fast riding, and the fines he had paid in the past because of this tendency. So he said nothing more.

As for Finch, he was not quite certain as to the precise object he had in mind in rendering the car, as it were, anonymous. Thoughts of various sorts had been filling his mind, and there was the impression that it would be just as well to have the license-plate illegible.

They were just outside of Larchmont when the engine went balky. Finch got under the car and consumed a great deal of time before Preston lifted up the radiator hood and located a parted wire connection.

"Why didn't you look there first?" he

asked, but Finch, who now, in his turn, appeared to be wool-gathering, gave nothing more than a muttered response.

"By the way," he said, "now that we're near Larchmont I guess I had better look Swandorf up in the telephone directory in that road-house over there. His place might be out this way. Besides, I think I'll call him up and see if he's in—call his house up, I mean."

"All right." Preston settled down in his seat and lighted a cigarette while Finch went over to the road-house and entered the telephone booth.

He speedily got the location he wanted on the wire—it was on the Sound shore in the direction of Rye—and learned that Mr. Swandorf had gone out and would not be back that night.

"But he might be found later at his little bungalow about a mile from the house near the water's edge," the butler added. "He is sometimes very nervous and likes to spend the night alone in the bungalow."

"I see," said Finch. "Very well. I won't bother him to-night." He rang off and returned to Preston.

"Jack," he announced, "Swandorf's gone off somewhere for the night. We'll go to a hotel here—there's one near the Larchmont Yacht Club, and then call on him bright and early."

"Why not go back to the city?" asked Preston.

But Finch retorted that they might as well stay, now they were here, and Preston, having no good reason to object, said nothing.

It would have been well for him had he followed his inclination and gone to New York.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BUNGALOW'S SECRET.

THE two had dinner at the hotel, and then, after they had watched the dancing for an hour, Finch arose, announcing that he was sleepy.

"I'm going to turn in for a long sleep," he said. "How about you?"

Preston frowned.

"Oh, don't come on my account," Finch continued. "Only, don't you come into my room with some new idea and wake me up."

Preston laughingly replied that there was not much danger, and went off to look for the manager of the hotel, seeking an introduction with one of the dancers who had been throwing wistful glances in his direction. Finch went upstairs.

The manager, one of those dapper summer-hotel men, who are always willing to oblige a guest, found a way to make Preston acquainted with not one, but several of the young women, and it was not until after one o'clock that the New Yorker went to his room, yearning for a cold bath.

It seemed as though he had hardly fallen asleep when he felt a slap on his shoulder and found Finch standing at his bedside.

"Come on, and get up," he said. "We must clean up this matter quickly and get back to the city; for if Swandorf falls down I have yet another idea to put to the test."

Finch's eyes were bleary, as though he had not slept well, and his manner was nervously jerky.

"What's the matter?" inquired Preston, getting out of bed. "Didn't you sleep well? You look as though you had been up all night."

"I do!" Finch started. "What makes you say that? I had a bully sleep—snored like a whale from the time I left you until an hour ago."

"That's the reason," Preston grinned. "Too much sleep is worse than none at all. Now, I didn't get to bed until after one o'clock, and I feel like a fighting-cock."

"All right, then hurry," returned Finch. "I've been over the car and there won't be any more trouble with her. Hurry up, now."

Finch retired and Preston hastily bathed and dressed.

They had a hasty breakfast and were soon on the way to Swandorf's home. The way led along an attractive road, with a trolley-car track on the side. At their right through the trees they caught a glimpse of a golf links, where several early risers were already moving about.

"By George!" ejaculated Preston, glancing enviously at the ardent players. "I'd like to have a game before the day gets too hot. Miss Oliphant invited me to play with her."

"Miss who?" asked Finch.

"Miss Oliphant. I met her at the dance last night," explained Jack. "Couldn't we run into the club for an hour or two?"

"We could not," snapped Finch. "Any one would think this was a pleasure trip and not business."

"Well, you haven't been as keen on the job as you might have been," Preston retorted. "Here we've wasted twenty-four hours over a matter that could have been settled over the telephone in New York."

Finch did not reply, but leaned forward over the wheel, peering along the road. At length around a bend appeared a tree-shaded driveway.

"That's the house," he announced. "We'll turn in and see if the old duffer has returned. They said he'd be in for breakfast."

Finch stopped the car in front of the door with its high Colonial pillars and rang the bell. A butler answered it. No, Mr. Swandorf had not returned, although they expected him to arrive at any minute. He was a little late for breakfast as it was.

"I am Mr. Finch, who spoke to you over the telephone last night," explained Harold. "You say he spent the night at his bungalow. Could you tell me how to get to it?"

The servant affably descended the steps and pointed out a private roadway, saying that if that was followed for about a mile it would bring them straight to the bungalow.

"But," he added, "unless you know Mr. Swandorf very well, sir, I should advise you to await his arrival here. When he goes to the bungalow it is because he wishes to work and think undisturbed, and I have known him to be very angry when interruption occurs, sir."

Preston was for waiting at the house, but his partner would have none of it. He waved his hand at the butler.

"We know Mr. Swandorf well enough, I think, to be able to excuse ourselves for annoying him. We are interested in a matter of business with him, and I've not the least doubt he'll be very glad to see us."

The butler nodded and returned to the house, while Finch threw in the clutch and started the motor-car along the graveled roadway, leading toward the water.

The bungalow, guarded by a row of poplars on the landside, the back resting upon a sea-wall, with the water directly beneath the rear windows, was not at all pretentious. But it was constructed with a view to bidding defiance both to the elements and to marauders.

The door was of oak, and very heavy. The windows had wooden blinds of the Colonial type. These were tightly closed, giving the place a vacant, wall-like appearance.

"H'm," muttered Preston, "that chap must be a recluse of the highest type. He certainly loves to shut himself in. I wonder if he's up?"

"Probably," grunted his companion. "We'll find out in a minute."

Stopping the car, he sprang to the ground, and advancing to the door, beat vigorously upon the knocker. As Preston joined him, he repeated the summons. Still no reply.

"I guess he's asleep, if he's there at all," suggested Preston. "Here, let me take a crack at that knocker."

Seizing it in his hand he slammed it to

and fro against the plate until the door fairly rattled. But no one answered, and Preston, delivering a lusty blow upon the door itself, was about to comment upon this when the door opened silently and in such uncanny fashion that Preston started backward.

"Well, here's a go, Finch!" he said. "After all our knocking the door was ready to be pushed open—and the house empty. At least it would appear to be empty, unless Swandorf is a good sleeper."

Without replying, Finch strode softly into the hall and stood surveying the interior. The hall was really a large room —as with most houses of the bungalow type.

There was a desk in the center, filled with books and papers, a reading-lamp of antique design, and along the wall a Turkish divan. The walls were hung with ancient weapons, and upon a mantel-shelf stood bronzes and pieces of bric-à-brac.

"This gives one a sort of queer sensation," whispered Preston. "I feel like a moving-picture-show hero. What are we going to do now?"

"Wait a minute," said Finch impatiently.

"Why wait?" Preston moved toward the door. "We've no business in here. We are no better than house-breakers. Swandorf undoubtedly has gone out. Let's beat it and wait for him at the house—probably he's there by now."

"Wait, I tell you!" cried Finch. "I don't like the looks of things here. There seems a bad odor about the place, an atmosphere of crime. Don't you catch it?"

"I don't know what I catch," rejoined Preston, "except the feeling that the sooner we get out of here the better for us."

Finch laughed disagreeably, and advanced toward a room at his right. It was a bedroom, and the bed plainly had not been occupied during the night.

Preston, finding the gloom oppressive, walked to a window and threw open a blind, filling the room with the morning sunlight.

"This doesn't look as though the old fellow had been here at all," said Finch.

Preston was about to agree with him when he noticed a pair of light shoes and a coat on the floor.

"He has been here, all right." Preston indicated the articles, adding: "Let's push on and see what's what."

He had not gone two steps when he started with an exclamation of surprise. Bending down he picked up a gold mesh-bag which glittered and sparkled in the morning light.

"Miss Hamilton's purse!" cried Preston, turning it over in his hand.

"That's what it is," Finch agreed, examining the receptacle. "It has her initials here on the lock—'C. H.'"

"Well, what do you make of that?" asked Preston, turning a bewildered face to his companion.

Unquestionably very grave doubts were running through his mind.

Finch, who had reasons of his own for being unwilling to tell Preston that Swandorf was probably the girl's guardian, shrugged his shoulders and raised his eyebrows.

"Our young Romeo begins to find that the course of true love—" But he ceased abruptly as Preston turned to him with a flush upon his cheeks and a dark look in his eyes.

"Chuck that, Hal," he said sharply. "What in the world is that purse doing there?"

"Let's go up to the house and see," suggested Finch. "Swandorf is not here, that's certain."

They left the bungalow, entered their car and drove hurriedly up to the larger dwelling. A servant was sweeping the veranda. In response to Finch's request the woman entered the house and summoned the butler.

"Yes, gentlemen?" The butler, Sammis by name, did not relish this interruption in his morning's duties. As a matter

of fact he was engaged in straightening out a tangle resulting from a quarrel between two of the maids in the kitchen when the summons of Preston and Finch reached him.

"I—" began Finch, but Preston interrupted him.

"Is Miss Cecil Hamilton here?" he asked, as Finch glared at him in unconcealed fury.

The butler nodded.

"Why, yes," he said, "she is. She has, in fact, just come down to the breakfast-room."

"I see," Finch broke in. "Well," abstracting a card from his case, "will you be kind enough to take this card to her." Preston, reaching into his pocket-book, produced another.

"Take this, too, please," he said. "By the way, has Mr. Swandorf arrived from his bungalow yet?"

The servant glanced at them surprisedly, and then shook his head.

"Why, no, sir. I—I understood that you two gentlemen had gone to see him there."

"We did, but he wasn't there," Preston replied. "At least, we could not find him."

The butler looked at them with a blank face, and then turning, said that he fancied it would be as well if he took their cards in to Miss Hamilton, whereupon he went into the house, neglecting to ask the callers to follow him.

He soon returned with the young woman, who was obviously surprised at the early call. She was in a filmy cream morning gown, which showed a wide expanse of flawless throat.

"Why, Mr. Finch—Mr. Preston! This *is* a surprise." She glanced from one to the other inquiringly.

"A pleasant one, I trust," returned the glib Finch, permitting a glance of great admiration to shine from his eyes. "We were motoring up this way and called to see Mr. Swandorf upon a business matter. We might add," and Finch smiled, "that we were utterly surprised to learn that you were here when the butler so informed us."

He went on to say that he was not aware of her friendship for Mr. Swandorf.

Preston flushing angrily, prodded his companion smartly in the back, but the girl, smiling brightly, nodded.

"No, I don't suppose you did," she answered. "As a matter of fact, Mr. Swandorf is my guardian—or rather, one of my guardians." She laughed. "My father left me very well equipped in that regard. But come in, won't you? Have you breakfasted?"

Both replied that they had, and then Finch said that if she had no objection they would, however, join her in a cup of coffee while she drank hers.

She waited a moment, as though in thought.

"The trouble is," she finally said, "that Mr. Swandorf does not like to breakfast alone; at least does not like to breakfast without me, when I am here. So I shall have to wait for him. He is at the bungalow."

"But that," Preston interposed, "is what we wish to speak to you about. We have been to the bungalow, and he is not there."

"Not there!" She glanced at the speaker. "You are not fooling me, Mr. Preston? He must be; at least he is not here, and I know he didn't go out for a ride, because I was just talking with the chauffeur on the house telephone."

Finch explained that they had just come from the bungalow; had, in fact, entered it, finding the door ajar, and that there were no signs of the owner.

"At least," he added, "we could not find him."

"Of course," interpolated Preston, "we did not go all over the place. But we made so much noise that he certainly would have heard us had he been in the bungalow."

Miss Hamilton's face expressed worry. She had spent the evening with him, going over some papers, she said, and had

been driven to the house about ten o'clock by the chauffeur.

Preston, throwing Finch a triumphant look, reached into his pocket and handed her the gold mesh-bag.

"We knew you had been there," he smiled, "because we found this lying on the floor. Rather a careless way to leave articles of value about—especially as it seems to be filled with money."

She took the bag, and then turned toward the steps, at the same time speaking to Sammis, who had remained a little in the background, a rather curious observer of the trio.

"Sammis," she ordered, "I think you had better come down to the bungalow with us. Mr. Swandorf should certainly have—" She stopped, "I mean you two should certainly have found him there. He is rather eccentric, and has probably gone off for a walk. But I think, if you don't mind, we'll all run down in your car, Mr. Finch."

Finch sprang to the wheel, and Preston assisted the girl into the rear seat. The butler took his place beside Finch. Thus they quickly traversed the little road that led to the shore.

"The place is just as we found it," said Finch, bringing the motor to a stop, "except that that blind on the side was opened by us. And, as I said, the door was slightly ajar."

"Most curious," muttered the girl, alighting and waiting for the others to join her. "He was not a great walker, and he never bathed in the Sound. I don't know what to make of it. But let us go in."

They entered the hall and found everything in order. Finch led the way into the bedroom and showed the girl where he had found her purse.

"Why, he couldn't have gone out, for, see, here are his shoes and his coat. That means he must be somewhere about. I wonder if he has fainted? I do not like this at all." She raised her voice. "Oh, Uncle Ben!"

Nothing resulted but the echo of her call. She winced and glanced at Preston. Most of her attention, by the way, had been given to Preston.

"I should say as how we ought to go through every room," the butler suggested, and in compliance the party moved from the bedroom into the hall, and thence, into a smaller bed-chamber.

This apartment had evidently contained no tenant. The kitchen was undisturbed, and the dining-room was in perfect order.

"He had the servants remove the dinner dishes last night," explained Cecil. "I dined here with him."

"What's over there?" asked Preston, nodding toward a closed door.

The girl hesitated for a moment and then colored.

"Why, that," she responded at length, "is his study. But—but—" She stopped and looked appealingly at the two young men. "I'm afraid to go in there."

"Why?" Preston was gazing at her curiously.

"Why, because—because, well, we have searched everywhere and called, and there has been no answer. And so, of course, in that room lies the explanation of it all. I feel it. I *know* it. Oh, some one please open that door. I'm afraid."

With a sober face the butler paced toward the closed room, Preston and Finch hanging back.

The measured tread of Sammis was like the beat of a muffled drum. He laid his hand upon the knob, turning it slightly. Then he looked back at the two men who had slowly followed him.

"The door is not locked," he said hoarsely.

"Then open it, for God's sake," commanded Preston.

There was a clicking sound. The butler pushed upon the door, and then, as it swung open with a bang, he stepped back and without looking into the apartment turned his face toward the group.

(To Be Continued.)

Reindeer on the Roof

by Joseph Ivers Lawrence

I.

"YOU are a self-confessed fortune hunter—no more, no less!"

Colonel Crofton spoke with little of malice or contempt in his tone; merely with characteristic superiority.

"The stigma of that impeachment is more fancied than real," replied the young man who had nominated himself as a candidate for son-in-law to Colonel Crofton. "If I were a big-game hunter I should be a guest of honor in your drawing-room, but you name me a fortune hunter and bar your doors to me—yet, believe me, the latter sport requires the higher courage."

"I would give the qualification another name, Mr. Spencer," retorted Crofton dryly. "A man who can come to me and ask for my daughter, and not only admit, but stipulate, that he has no money and expects the lady to bring a substantial dowry—that man has one pre-eminent trait! I could hardly dignify it as courage."

"Do I assume too much if I suggest the word honesty?" inquired Spencer.

"Perhaps not," was the answer. "Honesty appears in many varieties and degrees, to be sure."

"Hypocrisy is a thing so common, so general," Spencer continued rapidly, "that it is scarcely reckoned with nowadays; the absence of it is not noticed. If I were a smooth-tongued rascal, professing love for your daughter and contempt for your wealth, all in the same breath, you would be stone-blind to my mendacity, hail me as a son, and force a princely wedding gift upon my shrinking modesty.

"As it is, I have given your conventional sensibilities a rude shock; it's the first time, no doubt, that you have met a man having the courage to tell the whole truth. I do not beat about the bush; I tell you that Flora and I love each other devotedly; that I love her far too much to ask her to share my present fortune, which is practically negative. With five thousand dollars, to finance the enterprise that my brother and I are promoting, I shall be reasonably sure of a comfortable income in a short time. Then, with my energy and my natural instinct for large business, I shall probably be as wealthy, or wealthier, than you are now, in the course of a few years."

"You have the advantage of not being hampered by excessive modesty," remarked Colonel Crofton.

"Modesty is an outworn fallacy," returned the younger man. "You know yourself that modesty is rarer than virtue. The average man is a monster of conceit, but he goes mincing about, inviting flattery, and deprecating it, and people say that he is modest and unassuming. Offer your most modest and simpering ribbon-counter clerk the Presidency of the United States, and he will admit, after a proper paroxysm of confusion, that he is eminently qualified for the position."

"You are amusing, in a way, Spencer," Colonel Crofton said quietly, "but you do not inspire confidence."

"Of course I don't," the other fired back; "nothing unconventional can inspire confidence, so long as you base confidence on kiln-dried traditions and conventions. Now, we both know well enough that you secretly favor Howard Olmstead's suit for Flora's hand. Howard has never done a day's work, never will, and couldn't if he would; yet he inspires confidence. He has conventional manners, lounges around the best clubs, and hasn't energy enough to spend the whole of his annuity. Therefore, he is a safe proposition."

"I know that my attitude is hardly up-to-date," said Colonel Crofton, with a vague twinkle in his eye, "but while Howard Olmstead is an idler, and may never be anything else, he has a certain stock in trade that interests a careful parent; he offers a wife an unblemished family name and a social position established for four generations. You, with your violent logic and cold facts, cannot deny that the average woman needs little more than that for comparative happiness. If her husband is an idler, with a passive personality, she may be comfortably sure that he will give her little or no trouble."

"If one is to take a cynical view of everything, that is all very well," replied Spencer, "but Flora is not a mere potential society woman; she has imagination, and she will not be content with position and family name. Flora wants me—she has done me the honor to say so—and I want her. That is the situation as it stands."

"Well, you can't have her—with my consent," answered the colonel, without undue emotion. "I don't expect to play the stern parent of melodrama, chasing you and Flora in a post-chaise or limousine, but if she wants you she will have to take you as you are, and you will have to take her without the suggested dowry. I really don't intend to give myself any particular trouble, one way or the other."

He tilted back in his office chair and gazed serenely out of the twentieth-story window at the tree-tops of Madison Square, and John Spencer smiled slightly as he contrasted him with the traditional, merciless parent.

Colonel Crofton was a man in the late fifties or early sixties, lithe and athletic, as smartly dressed as a college junior, and with little left for the world to teach him, save that which he had no wish to know. The two men differed radically in nature and attitude, but Spencer did not fail to understand the other. Crofton had led the sort of life which is quietly disillusioning, which makes one a cheerful, but no less unrelenting, cynic.

"I am glad that you are not agitated about the situation," Spencer said coolly. "Of course, you may readily understand that I am not the sort to give up, merely for a matter of money. It simply makes everything more difficult for Flora and me, but I am accustomed to difficulties. My brother and I will eventually get the money we need to develop our business; we're bound to get it somewhere. Our plans for manufacturing a cheaper and better golf ball are reasonable and practical, so it is naturally hard to interest capital, even in so small a way. If we had a wildcat mining project, or an insane scheme to make truffles out of turnips, we could raise a million in a week, but we are too conservative to offer more than a profit of forty per cent."

"The man with a scheme to make a profit of forty per cent is more interesting after he begins to make it," remarked Colonel Crofton. "I confess I am more interested at the moment in the results of the yacht races at Narragansett next summer; I am building a yacht."

Thus the interview ended, the men parting as pleasantly as they had met, each convinced of the superiority of his judgment.

Spencer was hardly well out of the office when Mr. Howard Olmstead was announced and ushered in.

"How are you, Howard?" said the colonel, and they greeted each other with the cool informality of men who belong to the same clubs and are bored by the same things.

"Flora's been running me around town in her car, and she dropped me here," Olmstead announced.

"Glad you're on good terms with her," said Crofton.

"Fairly good terms, I should say," continued Olmstead; "but that's really what I came in to talk to you about."

"I'm not surprised," and Crofton yawned. "Flora has reached an age at which she is no longer merely the delight of my leisure hours. She is supplanting business, avocations, everything!"

"I'm quite ready to take her off your hands!" Olmstead declared.

"Oh, the market for the commodity is lively enough," chuckled the colonel, "but the terms of transfer are deucedly involved. You know, of course, Howard, that I have no objection to signing over all my rights to you, but these twenty-year-old flappers have a way, nowadays, of standing out for their own preferences. It makes the father business no sinecure. She's as changeable as the weather, you know, but just now she's reported to favor young Spencer."

"He's a bore, and he has nothing—absolutely nothing!" declared the younger man, and dismissed the matter with a wave of the hand.

"A father can't claim to know much about his own daughter," said Crofton uneasily, "but my fear is that she has too much sentiment. I'm afraid she'll get heroic and marry the noble young man, to show how little she cares for money! Then she'll suffer for it, unless I relent and come across."

"You mean that you have refused to finance such a marriage?" Olmstead inquired, with some interest.

"Absolutely!" declared the colonel. "If she takes Spencer, a husband is all she'll get."

"I must say, that rather pleases me," Olmstead remarked. "It's a capital idea. It simplifies things. Flora is a fine girl, splendid girl, an' all that—but my dear Crofton, she'd never get on without motor-cars and yachts and such. She likes all the things that cost money; she couldn't be happy without 'em."

"Mm—I wish she could be convinced of that before it's too late," murmured Crofton.

"You'd better let her understand your attitude toward Spencer," Olmstead advised. "And then, I think you ought to push the social business a little harder. If you went about more with Flora and gave more entertainments at your house, she wouldn't have so much time to get romantic about fellows like Spencer. I don't want to seem to be asking you to do all this for me, but if you got Flora into a whirl of excitement, you'd carry her off her feet, you know.

"Christmas is coming, and you might play that up. Have a Christmas party at the house and give Flora some really big things. Give her a necklace, or tiara, or something like that, with a few other gewgaws, and she'll begin to see what a poor figure Spencer would cut as the husband of such a girl. Incidentally you could suggest that our engagement should be announced at the Christmas party."

"Fixing me up for a regular Santa Claus!" Crofton sneered good-naturedly. "I fancy Flora would laugh. I don't take much thought of Christmas and things like that, you know. I usually

hand Flora a check and tell her to get a new car, or a sable coat. It's the easiest way out, and I'm not sentimental over such things."

"Oh, I wouldn't have you overdo it," Olmstead said hastily, "but I think it's time for you to play up a little sentimental stuff, to counteract what Spencer has been doing."

"I think you may be right in a way," Crofton admitted reluctantly; "I dare say I have left her too much to herself. We must go about more. I don't intend to make myself ridiculous, though, with a lot of sentiment and folderol."

II.

In the ensuing December days the charming and capricious Flora proved plastic beyond her father's highest hopes. If she knew of his efforts to discourage the ambitions of Spencer, she was at least not cast down about the affair, and she responded gaily to all the colonel's suggestions and schemes for light and luxurious diversion.

"I more than half think that she doesn't really care two pins about Spencer," the colonel confided to Olmstead.

"I hope you're right," was the response, "but I wouldn't be too sanguine about it. Things are going nicely, I should say, but I'd keep up the present program until we're well on the safe side."

In mid-December one of the reigning duchesses of society appeared in her box in the Golden Horseshoe radiant in the glory of a one-hundred-thousand-dollar necklace of diamonds. It had previously encircled an imperial throat in one of the European courts, but had been sold to a great American jeweler, after the outbreak of the world war, for patriotic reasons.

Flora, sitting with her father in the box which they occupied one evening each week, was girlishly ardent in her admiration of the glittering spectacle.

"I suppose you'll be wearing all that sort of thing before long, when you join the imposing ranks of New York matrons," Crofton hazarded, with secret misgivings. "Of course, you can't hang that sort of stuff on a mere schoolgirl, east of Pittsburgh, but I—well, I might manage to buy one about half the size of that for a little engagement or wedding gift."

He glanced covertly at Flora, alarmed at his temerity, but curious in the matter of her response.

"I'm vain enough to think I might look quite as well as she does in such a suit of armor," said the girl flippantly, without taking her sparkling eyes from the object of general interest.

Colonel Crofton was vastly pleased and surprised, but he knew better than to press the advantage.

"The opera is 'Boris Godunov,' I believe," he said dryly. "Suppose we listen to a few bars of the music?"

"I have been listening, really!" Flora protested with a pout. "I adore the opera. I wish I could have a box all my own, so I could go any night in the week."

The colonel brightened again.

"That means money," he said banteringly. "I suppose an adoring husband would provide it for you, along with the crown jewels, the steam yachts, and all that sort of thing."

But Flora had become absorbed in the action of the opera.

"I think Didur is stunning in this part, don't you?" she murmured. "There's something about his shoulders, or his walk, that reminds me of Jack Spencer."

"Mm — yes," responded the colonel, without enthusiasm. "I think Spencer might have done something as an actor; he shows theatrical tendencies."

"Howard Olmstead said he would drop in during the last act, to take us over to Sherry's for supper," the girl remarked casually.

"Good!" exclaimed her father, and the atmosphere was clear again.

At the club next day he gave Olmstead

a glowing report of his maneuvering, and the two men chuckled together.

"By Jove!" cried the younger one. "I would put forty or fifty thousand into a string of stones if I had the right to give it to her, you know. As a matter of fact, I was looking over a few things of the sort yesterday, and there's a rather famous necklace that can be had for about forty-five thousand. It would make a handsome engagement gift, wouldn't it?"

"I'd buy it myself, if I thought it would do the trick," Crofton said eagerly. "I'll walk up the avenue with you and take a look at it, if you care to."

A half-hour later the colonel was holding a string of glittering brilliants in his hand, fairly giddy for the moment in the fascination of them.

"I don't see how I can help buying them, Howard," he said softly. "Most any girl would be engaged, if only for a gift like that, eh?"

"It's magnificent!" Olmstead declared tensely. "Flora would look like an empress."

That was about all the conversation incident to the ensuing transaction in which Crofton gave his check for a considerable deposit upon the gems, but a quiet-looking customer, bending over the showcase near them, caught the words with well-trained ears, and turned them to his own account for a paltry five dollars or thereabouts.

The next issue of a certain weekly journal, more dreaded than enjoyed by many of its readers, contained the following paragraph, apparently cryptical, but not difficult for those familiar with society gossip to translate:

> A well-known clubman and yachtsman, who affects an honorary military title for every-day wear, has at last consummated for his attractive daughter the match that has long been known as his fondest dream. The young woman has no pressing need of the accession of wealth involved in the alliance, but she will be able, at least, to aspire to social pinnacles which the colonel could never hope to scale.
>
> The gentle warrior, hero of many a bloodless field, is so elated over this latest conquest that he has purchased for the winsome bride-elect a trifling bauble of precious stones at the price of a baronial country seat. Men about town are now tendering discreet sympathy to the impecunious young man, who has long cherished certain fond, but by no means secret, hopes.

"This!" roared the colonel, as he flourished a copy of the weekly journal in the face of Olmstead at the club, "is a damned, indecent, infernal outrage! I thought you had more discretion, Howard! Who got such a story out of you? Where were your wits?"

"Mind your own discretion, my dear fellow!" retorted Olmstead. "I don't know a thing about the beastly mess. If any one has been talking, it's yourself."

"Do you think I'm a fool?" demanded Crofton.

"Do you think I'm one?" Olmstead fired back with unwonted spirit.

"I beg your pardon," said the colonel, cooling slightly; "I'm sorry if I spoke too abruptly. I know that this wretched business is no fault of mine, and I dare say you're quite as innocent yourself. No one ever knows how this filthy sheet gets hold of such things. They get them, and that's all there is about it.

"Mind, I don't care a farthing about the raps at me, but these few lines may upset all our plans, and make beastly fools of us. Flora will see this, of course; there 'll be a hundred asses and tabby-cats ready to show it to her. I don't want to see her—I really don't. I'm leaving for Montreal this afternoon—on business — and I'm keeping away from the phone. She has a tongue like—like her mother's, when she fancies she has a grievance."

"I have seen her," said Olmstead dryly, as one might speak of having been present at the storming of Liége, "and she has already seen this paper."

The colonel caught his arm in a grip that made him wince.

"What did she say?" he demanded.

"She laughed—heartily," answered Olmstead.

"The devil she did!" cried the colonel with something like horror. "Then it's worse than I expected. Well, I'm off for Montreal, anyway, and I may not—may not be able to get back before Christmas Eve, you know. We have the invitations out for the party that night, and I suppose I'll manage to screw up courage to get there."

Olmstead was gravely thoughtful.

"That's really not such a bad idea," he drawled. "If you had a run-in now with Flora, it might easily upset everything, so you'd best keep away. She seems quite all right with me, and I'm not— Oh, I'm not afraid of her, you know! I fancy I can keep her in good humor."

"I'd be just as pleased if she were not in such good humor," said the colonel; "she's most difficult and dangerous when she's that way. I'm going to put the thing through, though, if it's possible. I don't want to see Flora till Christmas Eve; I don't want to talk to her. I'll arrive just in time for the dinner, and I'll bring the bally Christmas gifts with me. Flora's still a child, and she'll be carried away with the things. We'll have to act upon the psychological second. See?

"I'll mention that the necklace is not only a Christmas gift, but a token in celebration of your engagement, and I'll suggest that we give the happy tidings to our guests. It may fall flatter than a pancake, but we have a good chance. I have an idea that she'll give her consent, without really stopping to think what it's all about. And Flora's not a girl to renege, you know. She's a good sport."

Olmstead smiled sadly.

"It's rather tough," he said, "when a fellow's wild about a girl, that he has to win her by a regular conspiracy. Makes a chap feel rather low and mean, you know."

"Are you getting sentimental, too?" asked the colonel, with a sniff. "I say, aren't we acting absolutely for Flora's comfort and happiness? The child doesn't know her own mind. If she took up with a chap like Spencer she'd be miserable enough, I can tell you. You have the power to make her happy and contented, and you're a—a deucedly good fellow."

"Thanks!" drawled Olmstead, and was keen enough to feel for the moment damned with faint praise.

III.

CHRISTMAS was falling on Monday, and as the final practical preparations for the festival had to be made on Saturday, Flora Crofton came into the city early on that morning from Greenwich, where a school friend had entertained her for two days.

By a pleasant prearrangement, Jack Spencer met her at the station, Howard Olmstead's importunate eagerness to perform the same agreeable service having been discouraged.

"I suppose my car is outside," said Flora, after the first greetings; "I ordered it by phone. But you might send a wire for me, Jack, if you will. I had a message from father, in Montreal, forwarded to me at Greenwich. He's frightfully tied up there with business, and he can just barely get back to town for our little dinner Sunday night. He said that he would arrive with the guests. I wish you'd send him a wire and say that I have attended to everything, and if he gets home in time for the soup it will be quite all right. Sign my name, of course."

"Naturally!" exclaimed Spencer with a laugh. "I don't want to disturb his peace of mind unnecessarily."

Flora stood near the information-booth and waited while he went to the telegraph office, and she regarded idly the throng of travelers that poured through one of the gates from a train that had just arrived. There were men and women, big and little, of high and low degree; timid, weary migrants with lumpy cord-bound bundles; brisk, keen-eyed business men, with smart clothes and important-looking luggage; sleek tourists, fresh from Pull-

man staterooms, stalking ahead of a retinue of heavily laden porters.

A tall, majestic man, muffled to the nose in a rich fur coat, moved serenely through the gate, and Flora recognized him, with a start. But she was proud of the family *savoir-faire*, and a little cry of surprise was checked before it reached her lips. She turned abruptly and devoted herself to an eager study of the painting of the constellations upon the ceiling.

When she ventured another look at the floor level, she caught a fleeting glimpse of her statuesque parent as he darted nimbly through the exit to the subway at the expense of his habitual dignity and deliberation.

Flora was laughing almost audibly when Spencer came back to her.

"Father just came in from Montreal," she said breathlessly; "close on the heels of his telegram."

"Didn't he see you?" inquired Spencer uneasily.

"Evidently he did," she said, "for he ran like a deer, and I was kind enough not to let him know that I saw him."

She started for the Vanderbilt Avenue exit, but Spencer checked her suddenly.

"Let your chauffeur wait for a while," he said, "and we'll go out the other way and take a taxi; I want to do a lot of talking, if you don't mind."

IV.

Olmstead joined Colonel Crofton at his office late in the afternoon. The door was locked, and the colonel let in the visitor cautiously.

"Have you seen any one you know—any one that would tell Flora?" Olmstead inquired anxiously.

"No, but I nearly bumped into Flora at the station," was the answer. "By a lucky chance she was looking another way, so I escaped by running—literally running! I have sneaked around town like a fugitive from justice, and now I have to sneak into a room at the club and stay there until to-morrow night—Fancy! just to avoid the danger of having a serious talk with my adorable daughter."

"She's still in the best of humor," Olmstead informed him, "and she's been very gracious and friendly to me while you've been gone."

"Nothing reassuring about that!" declared the colonel.

Olmstead glanced at a pile of parcels, large and small, at the end of the desk, and smiled.

"Don't be afraid to laugh, if you want to!" snapped the colonel. "I never felt such a fool! I came into the building here with that camel-load of truck in my arms. Santa Claus! I ought to be wearing a red coat trimmed with cotton, and some white wool whiskers. Now, I have to tote the whole beastly cargo to the club, to be laughed at by the servants.

"I brought her a coat from Montreal—I've really been there, you know—and it's rather a fine one: Russian sable with ermine stuck around it in places. Then, as soon as I struck town, I gave up the rest of the forty-five thousand for that string of glass beads. I have it here, in that flat box, inviting murder and robbery.

"I have a lot of other gewgaws and trumpery, too, you see," he went on bitterly. "I lost my head on this Santa Claus business. I even took on a five-pound box of chocolates and bonbons, just to seem Christmassy—Fudge!"

"I suppose Flora thinks nothing of receiving ten or twelve pounds of sweets in a single day," said Olmstead. "You might have spared yourself that item."

"Spared myself nothing!" snorted the colonel. "I am Santa Claus for the first and last time. Don't forget that!"

"I think I'll run up and take tea with Flora," announced Olmstead, beginning to tire of the colonel's ill-humor. "If I can keep her mind occupied and cheerful till to-morrow night, I think everything will be all right."

"Everything certainly ought to be right after what I've been through!" as-

serted Crofton, and bowed the young man out of the office rather sourly.

The afternoon waned, and as dusk approached the colonel made ready to proceed stealthily to the cover of his club. He gathered his array of gifts together disgustedly after telephoning for a taxicab and took up his huge fur coat.

The weather had turned unseasonably sultry and the coat seemed ponderously uncomfortable. He threw it on a chair and resolved to go to the club as he was. He had a light top-coat in his room there, and that would do nicely for the next day.

Outside the office Jack Spencer stepped quietly from the elevator and reconnoitered. Under orders as a scout, he had been sent into the building by Flora to learn if the office sheltered the man who was supposed to be business-bound in Montreal.

He paused outside Crofton's door and listened for a while without result. Presently, however, his ear caught a rustling sound, then a muffled footstep. He started hastily for the elevator, to descend and make his report, but a backward glance showed him a shadow looming large upon the glass panel of the door.

He wished least of all to be surprised at his scout duty by the enemy, and he dashed down the corridor, looking frantically for the stairs. He came upon a narrow staircase, but it led upward, evidently to the roof of the building.

There was no time to pick and choose, and he darted up the steps, through a sort of hatchway, and out upon the broad gravel-paved roof.

Toward his left loomed the great shaft of the Metropolitan Tower, and in front of him the Flatiron Building rose like the bows of a giant ocean liner. He braced himself against the brisk breeze, held his hat firmly, and contemplated the imposing scene while he waited a safe interval.

Meanwhile Colonel Crofton stepped into the corridor and balanced his burden of parcels on his left arm while he locked the door. He stepped quickly to the elevator door to ring the bell, and was gratified to perceive that the car was ascending. It rose more slowly as it neared the top, and through the upper part of the steel grill-work, the colonel was amazed and horrified to discover the saucy, piquant face of his daughter.

It would never do! He had no time to retreat to his office and lock himself in, so he fled wildly down the corridor and up the narrow stairs to the roof. There he paused and listened for sounds of pursuit, but nothing happened and he felt comfortably certain that his escape had been successful.

He had never been on the roof before, and he found it vaguely interesting in its ugliness and practical simplicity, so radically different from the elaborate elegance of the floors below. He rested his parcels upon the gravel pavement and sauntered up and down, feeling a bit chilly without his overcoat.

Flora evidently had heard from some one that he was in town, he reflected. She would find his office securely locked, and in a short time she would go away, convinced, perhaps, that the report was false.

He went to the high cornice at the edge of the roof and tried to peer over the coping, to see if Flora's car was waiting in the street; but it was perilous to lean far over, and he could get only a panoramic view of Madison Square and the southward reaches of Broadway and Fifth Avenue.

With watch in hand he waited ten minutes. Surely the most curious and persistent woman would not have patience to remain in the building longer than that, he decided.

Darkness was coming on apace. A metal door clanged ominously somewhere, but he gave little heed to it. He gathered up the parcels grudgingly and began to grumble again as he bore them to the staircase.

There a startling surprise awaited him. The hatchway, which had stood so conveniently open at the time of his hurried

ascent, was now closed by a stout steel door. He grasped the ponderous latch and fumbled with it vainly.

With something like panic rushing upon him, he put down his load again and galloped about the roof in search of another stairway. But exploration was a simple matter and a discouraging one.

There were water tanks, skylights with iron gratings, a couple of little storage coops for water pails and the like, and innumerable pipes, tubes, wires and ventilating devices. He knew in a moment, with a sickening, sinking sensation, that the famous, but plainly idiotic, architects of the structure had provided but one staircase for the roof, whereas a dozen would not have been too many.

He assailed the steel door now with grim fury. His kicks and blows upon its unyielding panels must certainly be heard by the ignoramus whose duty it had been to see that the roof was clear before he closed the door. The ignoramus would come and open it again, and then there would be a reckoning; the colonel would free his mind of a growing weight of care and indignation.

In a moment he was exhausted, and he paused for breath and looked up at the now illuminated face of the great clock on the Metropolitan Tower. It registered five-thirty, and with characteristic independence he took out his watch to verify it.

"Every office in the beastly building closed by this time!" he exclaimed aloud. "Great heaven! have I got to spend the night on this ghastly roof, without food or shelter—all alone!"

"Not alone, at least, colonel," said a voice back of him, and he started and swung about nervously.

"Why—why, Spencer, what are you doing here?" he demanded, with a mixture of relief and challenge.

"I am waiting and hoping to escape," said the younger man, glancing wistfully at the steel door.

"Where were you when I was looking about?" Crofton inquired.

"I was sitting in one of those little shacks, out of the wind and frost," was the answer.

"But how came you here? What were you doing on this roof?"

"I might ask the same questions of you, sir," said Spencer. "I fancy that we should both have to become confidential in order to clear the matter up."

The colonel snorted angrily, but his mind went quickly back to the main issue.

"I say, don't you know of any way to get us out of this mess?" he asked sharply.

"I am not familiar with the building," said Spencer. "I thought you might know about the system of the watchmen, or something like that."

"I occupy an office here, in the daytime," Crofton returned crossly; "I haven't frequented the roof, and I haven't prowled about the place at night. You take the affair rather coolly, I must say! Do you know that we may have to stay here until morning?"

"I was thinking," said Spencer quietly, "that it might be longer than that. This is Saturday night, and I suppose the building is practically closed over Sunday. Then, you see, Monday is Christmas, so it will be much the same as Sunday. I wonder if the watchmen will take the trouble to visit the roof again before Tuesday."

The colonel paled slightly, and after a tense moment of passion he burst forth in a torrent of shocking abuse of the building, its designers, the administrative force and an indefinite portion of the human race, including Spencer.

"You have a number of parcels there," said Spencer, showing no resentment. "Perhaps some of them contain food or some form of nourishment."

"Those!" cried Crofton witheringly, "are idiotic Christmas gifts! I was taking them home, to delight the heart of my daughter," he added, with fresh bitterness.

"'Beware the Greeks bringing gifts,'" Spencer quoted facetiously.

"What do you mean?" thundered the colonel.

"A mere idle quotation from the classics," said Spencer.

"A sense of humor must be a veritable curse to some men!" remarked Crofton scathingly.

"But it may be a blessing in certain emergencies," the younger man replied. "Now, instead of exhausting yourself with fruitless oaths and raving you might be casting about for some way out of the predicament. For instance, you can write a message on one of those parcels, if you have a pencil or pen; then drop it down to the street and wait for somebody to pick it up, read the message, and come to your relief."

"But those parcels are—most of them are too valuable to throw away like that," objected the colonel. "To be sure, there's a five-pound box of chocolates there—"

"There! See? By calm discussion we have discovered a resource!" Spencer exclaimed. "If it comes to the worst, two men can live comfortably for a couple of days on five pounds of chocolates. Chocolate is rather cloying as a steady diet, but it is nutritious and stimulating."

"Two men, you say!" jeered the colonel, losing his temper again. "Don't get overoptimistic by counting on my—my provisions for yourself."

"I was merely stating a hypothetical case," replied the other. "I wanted to show that if two men could live on what you have there, one man should have no grave anxiety about himself. For myself, I am rather too much of a stoic to become alarmed in such a situation. I know that a man can endure cold and hunger for a considerable period without serious injury, if he does not give way to his emotions. A mood of calm resignation fortifies one doubly against such trials.

"See!" he exclaimed a moment later; "the clouds have cleared away and we are going to have a fair evening," and he pointed encouragingly at the stars.

The colonel mentioned in a muffled voice that his companion was a fool, and applied a qualifying adjective.

"I hope you'll enjoy your fine evening!" he added furiously. "If you had any sense you'd see that the clearing has made it colder. I'm freezing to death here."

"'The air bites shrewdly'—'It is a nipping and an eager air,'" Spencer quoted mercilessly. "But it puts a man on his mettle, doesn't it? There's nothing so bracing and stimulating as a frosty air like this."

He produced a pipe and tobacco-pouch, and as he made ready to smoke, the colonel weakened for the first time and looked at him with a certain wistfulness.

"Smoking helps a lot, of course," Spencer said casually. "I suppose you haven't a pipe about you?"

The colonel shook his head.

"If I had a cigar," he said miserably, "it would help."

To his surprise, Spencer promptly drew a leather case from his pocket and displayed the alluring ends of five cigars.

"Why, that's very good of you!" Crofton exclaimed, fidgeting uncomfortably. "But I'm afraid I'll be depriving you—"

"I rarely smoke cigars when I have a pipe," said Spencer. "However, I suppose the transfer of them would be a little more regular if there was some matter of consideration—say, two pounds and a half of chocolates, or something like that."

Crofton almost laughed, but checked himself in time to save his dignity.

"Take the whole beastly box, for all I care!" he cried. "I'd take my chances with five cigars sooner than I would with a ton of chocolates, any time."

The exchange was effected with due formality, and the colonel plainly enjoyed the first few puffs of a hastily lighted weed, but the cold grew more searching and he shivered and cringed until Spencer was moved to pity him.

"But why don't you do something?" he wanted to know. "I happen not to have a scrap of paper or a pencil about me, but there's paper enough around those parcels, if you have something to write with."

"I haven't a pen or pencil," Crofton almost wailed. "Can't we throw something off the roof, to attract attention? I wouldn't want to hurt any one in the street, but—"

"You must know," Spencer interrupted, "that it takes a good deal to attract the attention of the New York public. Once you have succeeded in getting it, you have the undivided attention of a howling mob, but I might jump off the roof myself, and no one would come up here to see where and how the jump started. I don't see what we can do unless we find something to write with. If you could get off a message, offering a reasonable reward for relief, it might work satisfactorily; but again it might not even be picked up. If you could write a message and throw it down with something of conspicuous value, the results would probably be prompt in appearing. We couldn't throw a watch down, of course, but if you had a package of considerable value—"

"There are too many 'ifs' in your proposition to be of any use!" snapped Crofton. "We haven't anything to write with, so there's no use thinking of it."

He smoked violently and fell to pacing the roof.

"With your overcoat on," he said presently, "you have no conception of the cold. I am numb; I am losing all feeling in my arms and legs."

"One of your parcels appears to contain cloth or wearing apparel," Spencer said solicitously. "If it were only a piece of cloth, you know, you might wrap it around you and—"

Crofton apparently did not relish the suggestion, but he promptly fell upon the largest of the packages and tore off its wrappings. Then there came to view a magnificent woman's coat of sable and ermine, full skirted and furnished with elaborate embellishments of collar, cuffs and facings.

The colonel snorted and muttered to himself, but he put the garment on and wrapped its folds snugly about him.

"You look for all the world like a Muscovite prince," remarked Spencer.

"More like a muscovy duck, you mean," snarled the other. "But be sure I don't look a bit more like a fool than I feel."

The cold strengthened as the evening advanced, and Spencer himself took to pacing the roof, with hands in pockets and collar turned up to his ears.

The colonel wailed no more about the frost, but grew more sulky and taciturn as the sense of confinement grew upon him.

"I wouldn't smoke all the cigars tonight, if I were you," Spencer advised, "you may need them badly to-morrow."

"I'll do as I like with them," returned the other ungraciously; "I bought them from you, didn't I?"

"As my company can do you no good," said Spencer, at the next meeting, "I think I'll turn in and try to sleep the night away if I can."

"Turn in!" almost yelled the other. "Where? How? Are you losing your mind?"

"That little shack over by the water-tank, where I was sitting when you arrived, is comparatively comfortable," Spencer explained. "I can sit on an inverted water-pail and lean against the wall. It affords protection from the wind, at least. I wouldn't monopolize it, but there's a similar structure at the other end of the roof, you see, and I would recommend it to you as a lodging for the night."

"About as good as a refrigerator, I fancy," sneered the colonel. "All right, go ahead; I'll excuse you. I may look over the other place later, but I'll keep on walking for a while."

Spencer retired from view and disturbed the colonel's reflections for a time with a great rattling of iron pails and other superfluous furniture. He could not lie down in the shack, but he fashioned a tolerable seat for himself and considered the situation as philosophically as possible.

Now and then he opened the door to glance at the Metropolitan clock or to observe his companion in exile; and about eleven he was at first startled, then interested, by the sight of a veritable bonfire.

The colonel, with sudden inspiration, had stripped all his parcels of their wrappings, made a pyre of the paper and pasteboard, and set fire to it in the hope of attracting attention. While the paper blazed, crackled, and swirled about in the wind, the colonel danced grotesquely in the firelight and waved a handkerchief above his head, but the beacon was short-lived: an unfeeling wind sped over from the East River, roared around the Metropolitan Tower, and descended fiercely upon the dancing suppliant. It caught up the blazing fragments and embers of his offering and whirled them away into the darkness, while the colonel addressed impressive periods to the elements without quoting the gentler poets.

Spencer, as a calm observer, was amused, and thought that some good might come of the experiment, but the hands of the illuminated clock crawled around to midnight, and the city was apparently still ignorant of the tragi-comedy on the high roof.

The cold crept into Spencer's shelter more searchingly as the night advanced, and he had to go out at intervals and walk the icy chill out of his legs. But after two o'clock both men were overcome with weariness and they retired to their respective camps and slept fitfully until the darkness began to show a tinge of gray.

Spencer ate a dozen or more of the chocolates as the dawn was breaking, then lighted his pipe and sat in the doorway of his shack to contemplate the sunrise. In a moment he discovered the colonel standing at the southern parapet of the roof and flinging handfuls of gravel down upon Madison Square.

"Rather like sprinkling drops of water on the ocean, I should say," remarked Spencer, as the colonel turned and saw him. "People familiar with Madison Square and the Flatiron Building winds hardly notice anything under the size of a paving-block, you know."

Crofton, however, was in slightly better humor.

"I don't think that this thing can keep up very long now," he said. "Some of the men that have offices in the Metropolitan are sure to come in this morning for something or other, and if we keep moving they'll see us."

"If it were not the day before Christmas I would share your hope," Spencer replied. "But, you see, nearly all business men are getting ready for the holiday; many of them have gone out of town, and it's possible that not a single office in that building will be opened today. Of course, if somebody should come into this building it would do us no good. We can't make the watchman hear us, so we can't expect help from below."

"You're as cheerful as a London fog!" said the colonel bitterly. "Do you think I'll stand this damnable ordeal much longer? Why, I'll throw this fur coat overboard if I can't make any one look up here any other way."

"Without a message accompanying it," said Spencer, "I hardly think you'd have much success. Some Broadway prowler would get a very precious piece of fur, and you would slowly freeze to death."

"If I could hit a policeman with my watch, something might be done about it," muttered Crofton.

"I wouldn't give way to such extravagant ideas," Spencer advised. "Come, I'll share my chocolates with you; you need nourishment."

The colonel was about to decline proudly, but the sight of the open box in Spencer's hand was too much for him, and he shamelessly ate of the sweets until a feeling of nausea put a check to his appetite.

The sun warmed them a little and gave them courage, and the colonel passed a part of the morning dancing and leaping

crazily around the roof, waving his handkerchief at the unresponsive windows of the surrounding sky-scrapers.

Near noon the sun was obscured by clouds, and a light snow began to fall.

"Nature's coverlet," remarked Spencer. "Like the 'King's Children,' we shall be shrouded in our last moments and tenderly put to sleep."

Crofton gave an opinion on nature that was at variance with the thought suggested by Spencer.

In the afternoon they were both vigorously hungry and ate greedily of the chocolates. The snow fell more heavily and the wind rose again. Crofton went from gloom to fury, and back to black depression.

"I should think your friends would notice your disappearance by this time," observed Spencer, "and start an inquiry."

Crofton groaned heavily.

"I am supposed to be in Montreal," he said bitterly, as though yielding up a reluctant confession. "I was not expected home until to-night. I came back—earlier than I expected to, you see."

Presently they were wading in moist, clinging snow as they tramped about the roof, and from time to time they took shelter from the stinging drive of the storm in their shacks, but only to come out again and resume the weary round to keep from freezing.

"Spencer!" cried the colonel at five o'clock, "something must be done. I couldn't live through another night, and I don't see how I can stand it another hour. I throw up my hands; I give up. Haven't you a single idea? Can't you suggest something?"

"I don't know what resources you may still have," was the answer. "Now, there might be something in one of those boxes of yours that would help us in some way."

"Nothing but gewgaws!" snapped the colonel disgustedly. "If it was a case of ransom I might do something. In that long, flat box there I have a— Well, you may as well know, I have a diamond necklace worth forty-five thousand dollars! Isn't that one of life's little ironies?"

Spencer betrayed no surprise, but brushed the clinging snow out of his eyes and fell to thinking deeply.

"Let me see," he said at last, "I believe you can write upon glass with a diamond. There's a small window in my shack, and it's easy enough to break glass out."

"Just how would you convey a piece of glass down twenty stories to the street and keep it intact?" Crofton inquired ironically.

"Wrap it up and pad it well, of course," answered the other soberly. "But, frankly, I doubt the success of the plan unless the piece of glass was accompanied by something unusually valuable."

"What, then?" inquired the colonel eagerly.

"The suggestion is wild, I admit," Spencer went on, "but it does no harm to make it. I think that if you threw down your forty-five-thousand-dollar necklace, you might, at least, stir up some sort of excitement."

"You're as mad as a hatter!" declared Crofton.

"We are involved in a mad adventure, aren't we?" returned the other. "I understood that you were desperate enough to do anything. Of course a dishonest person might hesitate to run away with such a tremendously valuable thing, and if there was a prospect of a large reward, the necklace would doubtless be returned at once. Ninety-nine men in a hundred would hasten to your relief and be happy to return the treasure and receive the reward."

"What figure would you name for such a reward?" Crofton asked sourly.

"The usual reward for the recovery of a piece of jewelry like that," answered Spencer, "is some eight or ten thousand dollars. It's the alternative, you know, of losing the whole treasure."

Crofton shook off a few miniature snowdrifts and squared his shoulders.

"Well, I'm not thinking of losing the whole treasure, to-day!" he said sarcastically. "If you have no suggestion more sane than that, we will continue to walk and try to think of pleasant things. I still have one cigar."

After dark the storm abated, the clouds broke, and the stars shone, but the cold grew more penetrating and bitter. The two men were forced to run and to beat their arms vigorously, and the situation grew tense.

Suddenly, as they crept from their shelters for the twentieth time since dusk, and began to run up and down, a peculiar radiance shot up from below, in Madison Square. It warmed the cold whiteness of the Metropolitan Tower and turned the ridges of ice upon the cornices to burnished gold.

"What's that!" cried Crofton, and hastened to the edge of the roof.

Spencer was there first, and he leaned far over the coping and immediately saw the cause of the illumination.

"Merry Christmas, Colonel Crofton!" he cried. "We are on the verge of the blessed festival of the Yuletide. This blaze of glory is from the Madison Square Christmas tree, and our joyous fellow citizens are making merry down there."

The colonel drew back in profound disgust.

"I never want to hear the word Christmas again!" he fumed. "Fancy! I was giving a Christmas party at my house this evening! If I ever get out of this scrape alive I'll be laughed at for the rest of my life. Every fool that I know will ask me a dozen times a week what I was doing on the roof."

"And what were you doing, if you don't mind?" inquired Spencer.

"What were *you* doing?" shouted the colonel angrily.

"We will let the question drop," said Spencer. "Listen! they are singing down there now. They have a great volunteer chorus, you know, to do Christmas carols, with an orchestra."

"Christmas fiddlesticks!" muttered the older man. "Ragtime would be more appropriate for this infernal city!"

From the square below came a glad burst of eager voices:

> "God rest ye, merry gentlemen;
> Let nothing you dismay."

"Throw something down at them!" yelled the colonel. "I'm too nervous and upset to stand that sort of piffle."

"It seems to me very beautiful and impressive," said Spencer. "Now they are singing 'Good King Wenceslaus.' I tell you it brings back the sentiment of old-time Christmas festivals."

The colonel choked in his fury and was forced to run violently to the end of the roof and back.

"Look here!" he thundered, planting himself in front of his irritating companion, "I'm going to get out of this scrape now! Give that beastly necklace, for all it's worth, to that rabble down there if you want to, but get help!! Get the fire department! Get the whole police force! Get anything!"

"My original suggestion stands," said Spencer calmly. "The idea seems better than ever, now. Throw your necklace right down into that blaze of light and it won't lie in the snow very long. Offer ten thousand dollars as a reward for its return and for your relief, and I'm sure that help will arrive here inside of ten minutes."

"Do it, for Heaven's sake, and stop talking about it!" groaned the desperate man.

Spencer retired quickly to the other end of the roof and disappeared within his shack. He was gone so long that the colonel called to him impatiently, but he came back at last with a square of glass in his hand.

Crofton produced the glittering, dazzling string of gems, and the younger man selected one of the larger stones and scratched the glass deeply with it.

"Help! Help!" he wrote, in bold characters, with a whimsical smile upon

his face. And then he composed a brief, clear message to the finder of the treasure, stating that its owner was confined upon the high roof in a perishing condition, and would pay the sum of ten thousand dollars to the person who returned the necklace and brought instant help to the sufferer.

Working with cool deliberation, Spencer padded the piece of glass with cotton wool from the jeweler's vellum box, then tied it firmly to the diamond necklace with narrow white ribbons from the same source.

"You're not going to wrap up the jewels?" Crofton queried.

"Not a bit," said Spencer. "You can't break a diamond, and I want them to sparkle as they fall through the air."

"Who'll do the throwing?" asked the colonel anxiously.

"As a former star of amateur baseball, I willingly offer my services," said Spencer.

The colonel nodded sullenly, and his eyes grew heavy with worry and belated consternation as he watched the younger man advance to the coping and measure the distance to the circle of bright light around the great Christmas tree.

"The tree is opposite Twenty-Fourth Street," murmured Spencer. "Well, I ought to throw a distance of two blocks without much trouble. Are you satisfied, colonel? Shall I go on with the scheme?"

The colonel nodded silently, tragically, and bowed his head upon his breast, but he raised his eyes again covertly as Spencer drew back, "wound up" for the throw, and then sent the glittering prize hurtling out through the air, straight at the blazing target of the tree of light.

The suspense was too much for the colonel. He darted forward and leaned over the coping with Spencer.

"See!" cried the latter, "it struck the tree; it bounded off! Look there! A man is jumping for it. He's got it! He's got it!"

"But what will we get? That's the big question!" moaned Crofton.

"Wait!" cautioned Spencer. "Now is the time of all for heroic patience."

The colonel stamped up and down in the hard-packed snow. At intervals he ran to the cornice and peered down at the throng, then darted to the door of the stairway and listened, with agony painted graphically upon his face.

Ten minutes passed, a quarter hour, twenty minutes; then the two men heard a metal door flung open.

"The door at the bottom of the stairs!" yelled Crofton.

They heard muffled voices from below,

"Sounds like a crowd," muttered the colonel.

"Merry Christmas!" cried Spencer. "It's Santa Claus and his reindeers coming over the roof as they did of yore!"

A key rattled in the lock, and the door was flung open. A watchman of the building stepped out, looking rather disturbed and annoyed, and he was followed by two policemen, a smartly dressed civilian—and by Flora Crofton.

"Merry Christmas, daddy!" the girl cried gaily.

The colonel became reserved and dignified. He dismissed the policemen and the watchmen politely, and with some small gratuities, then turned to the others.

"I am happy to rescue you from such a wretched plight, Colonel Crofton," said the man who held the necklace, "and as I need the money in my business, I am happy to be the one to claim the handsome reward."

Crofton looked at him coldly.

"I think we have met before," he said. "Aren't you Mr. Spencer's brother?"

"To be sure!" cried the rescuer gaily. "That's all the better, isn't it?"

"How did this extraordinary situation come about, if I may be so curious?" demanded the colonel.

"I will explain," said Jack Spencer unblushingly. "I didn't want the necklace and the reward to fall into unworthy hands, so I took time to telephone to my brother at a club near the square and tell him to be ready to catch the prize when

I threw it. I trusted to his ability and alertness."

"You telephoned!" shrieked the colonel. "Are you mad?"

"Why, you see, there's a telephone instrument in my little shack over there," Spencer explained calmly. "It was put in, I suppose, for the use of engineers and workmen here on the roof. I managed to get the night watchman down-stairs to the switchboard, and he evidently thought that the call came from some one in one of the offices."

"And you knew that phone was there all the time!" gasped the colonel.

"Oh, I used it once or twice last night," admitted Spencer. "Conspiracy for conspiracy, you know, colonel. Plot and counterplot! You came upon the roof of your own accord, but when I had you here, in such a predicament, I was not disposed to neglect the opportunity. Flora and I saw through your elaborate plot with Howard Olmstead some time ago, and she was not desirous of the success of the Christmas party. The Fates, you see, played into my hands very handsomely. My brother and I now have ample means for the development of our business, and this is a very merry Christmas, indeed."

"What are you doing here?" snarled the colonel, turning upon Flora.

"Why, Jack phoned me all about it this morning," she answered readily, "and I've been waiting in a house around the corner ever since for the—the dénouement. Jack's brother stopped for me, you see, and brought me here with him."

"The only thing that drives me mad," said the colonel despairingly, "is the fear that I can't have you all prosecuted for this outrage.

"You don't suppose for a minute, do you, that I'll ever let you marry this—scoundrel?" he thundered, turning upon the girl again.

"Why, just as a precaution, father," she said demurely, "Jack and I were married yesterday morning. We were going to tell you about it at your office, but you fled to the roof, you know, and that changed all our plans. So now we're ready for the wedding presents and the Christmas gifts, and all that sort of thing."

The colonel pondered tragically for a minute or two; then he moved slowly toward the staircase.

"I will go to the club and have a hot toddy," he said, "and then I may be able to think."

THE FLIGHT OF TIME

IT was midnight and moonlight, the bells were all ringing,
When I heard a commotion outside of my door;
And lo, in the snow was a gasoline buggy
That had made up its mind not to go any more.

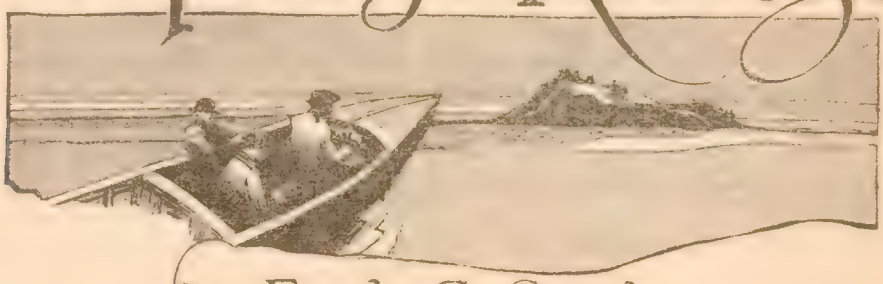
One thousand nine hundred sixteen was its license.
And, bundled in furs from his head to his heels,
Old Time stood beside it and wept in his whiskers;
For how could he travel without any wheels?

Just then, with a whir, on a snow-bank alighted
A beautiful aeroplane shaped like a bird;
The New Year sat in it, his hand on the lever;
He was hooded in leather and goggled and furred.

"Jump in," he exclaimed, "and continue your journey."
So old Father Time climbed aboard with delight,
And, soaring aloft with the speed of an arrow,
They darted away through the star-spangled night.

Minna Irving

His Isle of Refuge



by Fred C. Smale

CHAPTER XXI.

A TRUCE.

SAVILLE had been laboring for some hours when the idea occurred to him and he threw down his burden of stone and sand with an exultant whoop. For the short time that remained to noon he busily occupied himself; but not in constructing the ship.

Then, at the midday meal, instead of lowering Foularde's share as usual, he called up the engineer, much to that individual's surprise, and bade him seat himself on an improvised bench at the opposite side of the table.

"My worthy colleague," began Saville cheerily, "you will be pleased to hear that I have evolved a plan whereby we can labor together, if not precisely in brotherly love and sympathy, at any rate without mutual distrust."

Foularde stared at the speaker.

"I do not understand, *monsieur.*"

"Listen. During the past hour I have removed every particle of food from this place, save what we have now on the table. It reposes, carefully packed in tins, in a not too remote part of the island, where you could not possibly find it did you search for a week of Sundays. Now observe my ingenuity!

"You are not the only clever man on this island, my worthy Foularde. Should you be foolish enough to drop a spanner accidentally on my skull or in any other way make yourself objectionable at my expense, it will mean a particularly painful death for yourself, for without me you will starve—do you follow me?"

The engineer shrugged his shoulders.

"Perfectly, *monsieur,* but may I be allowed to observe zat zere was no necessitee for zis. I would have play ze game, as you English say."

"Perhaps so, but you must admit that this plan of mine will prevent misunderstanding. I am as necessary to you as you are to me now and we shall get on much quicker. To be candid, I am very glad of it. This jiggery-pokery business was getting on my nerves and I might have shot you out of mere hysteria. Monsieur Foularde, we will drink to success. Henceforth we labor side by side. Fellow-toiler, I salute you!"

Foularde's teeth gleamed, and he raised his glass.

"To success," he said gravely.

"Ah," returned Saville. "Now, I wonder what the deuce you mean by that! However, we will to the boat. When we have disjointed her we will turn to the navvying part of the business. I shall have no fear of your braining me with a lump of rock now. I can't think how it was I didn't strike the notion earlier. Of course I shall have to bottle

This story began in the August Argosy.

you up temporarily on each occasion that I visit my *cache* for supplies, but you mustn't mind that."

"We get on queek now," said Foularde complacently.

Henceforth they worked together, the Frenchman talking gaily of home and of the girl he meant to marry. He frankly confessed that he had looked to the reward which he had counted upon obtaining for Saville's apprehension to set him up in life.

As it was—well, *monsieur* had said something of a fee. Perhaps he would be generous, then, with what Saville had paid him originally he and his Jeanette would do well enough.

But Saville was not altogether convinced, and he abated no one of his precautions against possible treachery.

In three days' time they had taken the boat apart and hoisted the sections into the upper chamber. They then proceeded to construct the slipway.

On the second day of their work on this a sudden gale sprang up and Saville experienced the bitterness of seeing the results of their labor entirely nullified. For forty-eight hours the storm lasted. It was impossible even to visit his hidden food supply, though of water they had more than enough, for it rained with tropical violence.

Saville chafed restlessly in the cave, almost every inch of which was taken up by the boat sections. Foularde took the delay philosophically, smoking endless cigarettes to reduce his hunger; indeed Saville thought the Belgian seemed more pleased than otherwise, though he feigned impatience at odd times.

At last the weather cleared, the turbulent waves ceased to break over the little quay and they were able to recommence their task. Saville drove the work on with increased energy and in two days the slipway was ready.

Then they lowered the sections from the cavern above and began the reconstruction of the motor-boat. Saville became feverishly anxious now. Another gale at this juncture would ruin all.

But the elements remained tranquil and at last the boat stood complete even to the motor, which they had been compelled to build in with the sections, as it would have been impossible with their lack of appliances to lift the heavy weight over the side. The propellers only remained.

Saville feared injury to these during launching and decided to fix them afterwards.

When the connections were completed and the last nut screwed down, he leaped from the high bank on which the boat lay.

"This," said he, "is where we ought to cheer. Do you feel like cheering, Foularde?"

"It ees a good job done," replied Foularde soberly.

"That is not quite an answer to my question," observed Saville, "but I won't ask too much of you. I will treat you to an extra bottle of wine any way. I suppose you won't object to that."

Foularde's sallow features relaxed.

"*Monsieur* ees vair kind."

Saville nodded and went off to his hidden store. He did not trouble to send Foularde into the cave this time. The boat was finished and he felt quite competent to keep the other in hand during the brief remaining time that they would be together.

When Saville returned he found the Frenchman busy testing the motor.

"I sink she vill go all right, *monsieur*," said he, and Saville noticed a curious tremor in his voice.

Triumph at his successful work, no doubt. The fellow's heart was in his profession.

"We will try her before nightfall," replied Saville. "If we can only—"

He broke off suddenly with mouth agape. The bottle in his hand dropped on the rock and the red wine ran away amid the broken glass. Far off over the blue water a long trail of smoke showed on the horizon.

Foularde chuckled quietly.

"I see heem ten minutes ago," said

he, "Monsieur Saville. Your boat ees built a leetle too late, after all."

CHAPTER XXII.

FRIEND OR FOE?

FOULARDE'S taunt fell on deaf ears. Saville stared at the apparition on the sky-line as though petrified, with a heart full of bitterness and desperation.

So all his labor had been in vain. Should he make a dash for it even now. No, it was hopeless. It would take fully an hour to launch the boat and fit the propellers, even if all went smoothly. By that time the enemy would be at their doors, for that the ship in the offing was an enemy, he doubted not.

With a sigh that was half a groan he turned away. For the moment his brain felt numbed. Then Foularde's mocking voice recalled him to himself, and the Belgian's taunt of some minutes before reached Saville's consciousness in that curiously belated manner in which words, seemingly unheard at the time of utterance, sometimes bear their tardy message.

He drew his revolver, which he had never relinquished, and turned savagely.

"Up into the cave with you," he exclaimed. "Another word and I will shoot you out of hand!"

Foularde seemed inclined to bluster for a moment, but after a glance at Saville's face and the threatening revolver, he ascended the ladder with a shrug of resignation.

Saville followed swiftly. Sharply he ordered the fellow into the lower cavern and closed down the stone after him. A very brief time sufficed to reconvey the food supply to the upper cave.

He must be prepared to stand a siege and he determined that he would fight it out to the end. He cursed the chance which left the boat there for all eyes to see—a standing evidence of his presence and his futile attempt to escape.

Had it been possible, he would have launched and sunk her there and then. With Foularde impotent to betray him, he might still have fooled those who came to search—not so much for him, perhaps, as for traces of Coulson Stanbury.

As it was, the boat betrayed the truth near enough, and even if he succeeded in eluding discovery, they would take away his only means of escape, and he would have to choose between surrender and ultimate starvation.

Saville mounted the ladder and moodily drew it up after him. He raised his glasses and surveyed the approaching ship.

He felt a dull curiosity as to the identity of those who had come across that wide expanse of ocean to destroy his hopes and take from him his liberty. He looked steadily. Then a mist seemed to swim before the lenses and he sank on one knee that he might steady his trembling hand.

He looked again, scarcely breathing. Was he mad or dreaming! Surely he recognized that square-bowed, red-funneled craft with the stumpy masts and red pennant streaming out in the breeze. The Benmore! Andrew Trail! Ellen Lisle had kept her word!

Yet, how was it possible? At that moment a puff of white smoke appeared and a gun boomed forth. Then another and, after a longer pause, a third! The private signal agreed upon between Trail and himself!

Saville leaped to his feet with a wild, exultant shout. The ship was much too far away for him to be heard by any on board, but they had glasses and they could see.

He darted into the cave and returning with a white cloth, waved it madly. He was saved, how, he did not strive to understand at the moment. He ran to the trap-door and raised the stone as though it were a cork.

"Foularde! Come up you infernal dynamiter!" he shouted. "I've news for you. The ship contains my friends, you scoundrel, friends—*comprenez vous?*"

Foularde had heard the guns and

somewhat pale, he came out on the ledge and gazed at the approaching vessel.

"*Monsieur* is vair fortunate," said he at last. "Ze sheep vill take us away from zis place now."

Saville raised his eyebrows. The Belgian's impudence amused him.

"Us!" he repeated.

"You vill not leave me here to starve, *monsieur!*"

"We shall see what the captain of the ship has to say," replied Saville. "You weren't over polite just now you know, Monsieur Foularde."

The other cast a look of vindictive hate at the speaker, but Saville paid him small attention. He was watching the ship which was to bear him back to civilization, or perchance to some fresh hiding-place. Through his glasses he discerned the flutter of white.

Some one was waving a handkerchief from the bridge—A woman! Saville's pulse quickened. There was only one woman in the world that could know he was there. Ellen Lisle! Had the brave girl come herself to make sure of his safety?

Then, for the first time since recognizing the Benmore, Saville began to make calculations regarding time. How could Ellen Lisle have found Andrew Trail and delivered her message within so short a period! It was barely ten days since the Gitana had left the island. Ten days in which to reach San Francisco, find Michael Trail and return in the Benmore!

It seemed impossible. It *was* impossible. But there she was, Saville recognized her clearly now and beside her brown-bearded Andrew Trail.

At that moment a sudden outcry from within the cave startled Saville. He rushed within to behold Foularde lying by the opening to the lower cavern, his face twisted in mortal agony.

"Ze stone — it fall — an' crush — my foot, *monsieur,*" he gasped.

Saville, all unsuspicious, knelt beside the writhing man. Then Foularde, with a ferocious cry of triumph snatched the revolver from the other's belt and, leaping up, brought the butt of the weapon down upon Saville's head with terrific force, felling him unconscious to the ground.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE DUEL IN THE CAVE.

SAVILLE at last realized that the dull, throbbing pain in his head was a grim reality and not merely a vivid nightmare. He furthermore grasped the fact that he was lying on his back with his hands tied behind him and his legs also bound.

He opened his eyes wearily to encounter those of Foularde who sat watching him with an expression of malignant triumph.

"So, *monsieur,*" he said softly, "I am, vat you call, top dog."

"You're a dog, right enough," retorted Saville, though the effort to speak sent an additional pang through his head.

"I have not gag you," said Foularde, "as I do not think you will make a noise. I would not try if I were you."

Then Saville saw that his revolver lay ready at the speaker's hand. The tables were turned with a vengeance! Saville strove to recall what had happened.

"What of the ship — the Benmore?" he gasped weakly. "Has she gone?"

Foularde laughed shortly.

"Not yet. She will remain to search a leetle and find nozing—only ze boat. Then she vill go away and we will wait a leetle longer, you and I, *monsieur.* Then anozer sheep will come. My friends, this time, *monsieur.*"

"You poor fool," Saville said wearily. "Andrew Trail will pass this island through a sieve before he quits it, and even if we are left here we shall starve. No other ship will come here for a month, unless by a miracle."

"Then ze miracle will happen," replied Foularde calmly. "I have arrange

zat. Listen, Monsieur Saville. When I left ze Gitana I left a message wis a sailor to be sent to a friend in New York. Mistare Jake Barstow. It will be telegraph immediately ze Gitana gets to land. Mistare Barstow will understand zat you Saville, ze thief for whom zere ees one big reward, ees here on zis island. I have give ze position.

"He vill give information to ze poleece. Zey will send at once and my friend and I divide ze reward, *hein!* I have not told you zis before, but you would not have got away in ze boat in any case. Ze motor would not work—I see to zat."

"Curse you for a treacherous hound! Old Andrew was right, after all," muttered Saville.

How long had he been lying there, he wondered. He did not know whether it was day or night. The entrance to the cave was closed, and Foularde, probably fearing that some slight chink in the rock might betray him, had switched off the electric light, and the spot where Saville lay was dimly illuminated by a candle.

What a dull fool he had been to fall into the crude trap which Foularde had set for him! And just at the moment of victory, too!

The reflection was maddening, and Saville strained at his bonds in vain. Then his quick ear caught a faint, scraping sound. They were rearing a ladder against the cliff. Of course, they must have seen him even at that distance when he had signaled, and Ellen Lisle knew the secret of the cave.

His hopes rose only to be immediately dashed by Foularde's hateful voice:—

"Zey search," said the Belgian in a low tone. "One leetle cry, *monsieur,* and I will choke you—so!" and the lean, bony fingers were at Saville's throat.

"I have removed ze lever from wis-out," continued Foularde in a whisper. "Zey cannot come here, even if zey knew we are within."

Saville could not suppress a slight groan, though the fingers closed menacingly. He heard the muffled sound of voices without, a woman's among them.

Ellen Lisle had acted as guide. She was there—within a few yards of him. Saville ground his teeth in impotent fury. Foularde, without removing his hand, blew out the candle and they were in utter darkness.

Then a gun boomed forth. Perhaps they thought he had not recognized the ship or suspected a trap and was hiding. The searchers had left the ledge, and Foularde removed his hand.

"Zey are gone, *monsieur,*" he whispered, "but be silent. Not a word!"

In a frenzy of sudden rage Saville writhed violently as he lay, only to wince with pain as his hands scraped against a sharp-edged rock. A gleam of hope flashed across him as he once more lay motionless, and he twisted his body so that the cord which bound his wrists rubbed against the edge of the stone.

"Lie steel," said Foularde sharply.

Saville groaned.

"My head is paining me terribly," said he in a faint voice, "and I am getting cramped. Can you not release my legs at least. You have the revolver and with my hands tied I can do nothing."

Foularde laughed callously.

"Ven ze sheep ees gone, I will consider eet," he replied.

Saville made no further appeal, but groaned and shuffled until Foularde cursed him in a low voice. His wrists were raw and bleeding and his whole body throbbed with pain, but it seemed to him that his efforts were not in vain and that the cord was nearly severed.

Suddenly it parted and his mangled hands were free.

"Vat ees it you do?" queried Foularde suspiciously, and Saville lay in an agony of fear lest the candle should be relit and his bonds examined.

"Go to the devil," he replied sullenly. "I was only trying to ease the cramp in my legs. You are torturing me, you fiend!"

Foularde laughed,

"It vill do you good to suffer a leetle," said he, and Saville was left to make his next move.

He drew his hands from underneath him with infinite caution, though it cost him agony. His shoulders felt as though red hot irons were being thrust through them. He had no knife to cut the cords which bound his legs, nor was the sharp stone loose, otherwise he might have made shift to use it.

He tried to unfasten the knots, but his fingers, raw and stiff as they were, found it an impossible task. Besides he feared that Foularde would suspect something if he fidgeted about too much.

The sound of deep, regular breathing came from the chair in which Foularde now sat. Was he asleep? It would seem that he was, at least, dozing. Saville took fresh heart. He knew that a few yards behind him and to the left, was the switch which governed the electric light. Slowly, using his hands as levers, he dragged himself toward the sleeping man.

The position of the revolver on the table was clearly visualized in Saville's brain, and his fingers, quivering like the antennæ of an insect, touched the cold barrel almost immediately. The breathing was deep and regular enough now, but it was in absolute silence that Saville slid back to the wall.

To raise himself to an erect position without breaking that silence was not so easy, but he managed it at last, though Foularde stirred uneasily once. Saville's left hand reached out through the darkness, and the light blazed forth. Foularde leaped up with a startled oath.

"Up with your hands," cried Saville, and there was a savage determination in his steelly tone, which cowed Foularde even more than the menacing barrel into which he found himself staring.

"Throw a knife on the floor—there at my feet," commanded Saville.

"I have no knife, *monsieur*," replied Foularde, his voice shaking.

Saville hesitated a moment, then stooping slightly, he discharged the revolver. The bonds fell away and his legs were free. He staggered momentarily. The circulation returning in his numbed limbs was causing him agony. The revolver drooped in his nerveless hand.

Swift as a panther, Foularde saw his chance and, diving forward, snatched the weapon from Saville, who no less quickly reached out and switched off the light, stooping low at the same time.

The last movement saved his life. Foularde fired and Saville heard the bullet strike the wall behind him. He was rapidly recovering the use of his legs and he stepped noiselessly a few paces to the right. His hand came in contact with something on the table. It was the candlestick. He tossed it across the chamber. It fell with a clatter close to Foularde, who uttered a sudden cry of alarm and fired again, wildly, in the direction of the sound.

Then Saville, exerting all his strength, raised the table and hurled it directly at Foularde, whose position the mauve flash had revealed. There was a crash, a louder shriek of terror, then a sound which made Saville's blood run cold.

The opening to the lower cave had been left uncovered and Foularde had stepped over into the gulf.

CHAPTER XXIV.

FATE'S DECREE.

SAVILLE and Ellen Lisle were on the ledge together. The Benmore lay at anchor on the other side of the island and they were as much alone as though in the midst of a desert.

Foularde had met his death instantaneously, and Saville, shaken and all but exhausted had gone out to meet speedy rescue. He now reclined on the ledge as of old and sweet companionship made his paradise complete.

"And so you met the old Benmore only five days out," said he. "That was luck indeed."

"More than luck," said Ellen Lisle gravely.

"Perhaps you are right," returned Saville. "But how did you contrive to leave the Gitana without arousing suspicion?"

The girl smiled.

"Perhaps I was not quite successful there, though, after all, they had no reason to suspect anything. No one on board knew of my visit to you or indeed of your existence on this island. I insisted, somewhat hysterically perhaps, on leaving the yacht because I held her to be an ill-fated vessel. They thought me a little mad, I dare say. Indeed, General Vyner and his wife told me as much, but they did not venture beyond persuasion. If they had—well, I should have had to swim for it again.

"Of course, my greatest difficulty was in getting a word with Mr. Trail alone. After that it was all right. He confirmed my story of his being an old friend of my father's, though he had never heard my name before in his life."

There was a brief silence and they both watched the path of the sparkling sunlight on the water.

"Had Foularde not arranged for that telegram I do not know that I would leave the island even now," said Saville slowly. "The Benmore, as you know, has brought supplies. But, of course, Foularde's treachery drives me from this place for ever."

"You would have remained here—alone!" exclaimed Ellen Lisle.

"I have been very happy here—happier than I ever have been elsewhere, I think. Yet I dare say I should weary of it in time."

"But the loneliness—the solitude—it must be terrible!"

"I must say that I have longed for companionship at times, and indeed on one occasion of an unexpected visit, found it very sweet."

Ellen Lisle blushed.

"I have often wondered how I found courage to come to you that night. You might have shot me down unchallenged in the darkness—but I saw no other way of warning you—and even then I was too late," she added regretfully.

"I could have done nothing to prevent their destroying the cave even had I known of their intention," replied Saville. "Besides, you have come again — and not too late this time. Had it not been for you the island would in all probability have been my tomb as well as Foularde's."

The girl shuddered.

"And now—what will you do?"

"I shall leave the Benmore in the motor-boat at night, one of the hands accompanying me. They have thoroughly overhauled the engine and, as you know, the boat is now in tow. I propose to land somewhere on the Mexican coast. The man who accompanies me will return to the Benmore. Then the motor-boat will be taken to pieces and stowed away on the ship."

"And after you have landed?"

"That depends upon circumstances. I have money lodged under different names in various banks. I dare say I shall manage all right."

"But if you are recognized!"

"Then I must pay the penalty, I suppose—but not without a good fight first. After all, who will care?"

"I care," said Ellen Lisle quietly and her eyes filled. "For my father's sake," she added quickly.

Saville glanced at her swiftly, then looked away again. He seemed to be struggling with himself. Then he suddenly seized her hand with a grip which almost caused her to cry out.

"Ah," he said hoarsely, "if it were but a little—for my own!"

"Perhaps it is—a little," she faltered.

"Ellen!"

She turned swimming eyes to him.

"Oh, give up this lawless life," she cried. "Make a new beginning. You are strong, you are not yet old. Surely there is honest work for you in the world."

He flung her hand from him almost brutally.

"Honest work!" he exclaimed in a harsh tone. "Honest work for such as I! A criminal for whom the police of three countries search. A man with a price upon his head! Yes there is honest work for me—in Sing Sing or Portland. Ah, little girl"—his voice became tender as a woman's—"it is impossible. Would to God you had never come to me—never striven to serve me! It would have been better, after all, to let things take their course. Do not think me ungrateful—indeed I feel more than gratitude—I—"

He rose abruptly without completing his sentence and stood staring moodily over the water.

Ellen Lisle sat quite still, gazing, too, over the sunlit sea, until he turned to her.

"We shall probably never meet again," he said hurriedly. "After we board the Benmore, presently, I shall not attempt to see you. It will be best so. Do not think that I shall ever forget. May you find happiness—and Ellen, it will be the first and last time—kiss me just this once."

She raised her face to his, and he seized her in his arms.

"Once—just once," he repeated.

"Take me with you," she breathed.

Saville's startled eyes burned into hers.

"You—you ask me this—you would give yourself to me!" Then he strove to put her from him, but she clung the more tightly.

"Take me," she repeated simply.

"And you would be my wife—would share my perils—my shame! Would let me drag you down into the depths!"

"No—no! I would raise you to the heights," she replied passionately. "To hope and to Heaven. I would save you from yourself. But whether I succeed or fail I am yours—yours—yours, to the end."

Beneath them the milk-warm waves lapped lazily, and a lizard ran across the rock in the hot sunshine. Over all was silence and the immensity of sea and sky, with the sun pendant above, as though one great eye were watching.

Saville drew a deep breath.

"Be it so," said he, his lips on hers. "And God help us both."

THE END.

Babes on Broadway

by Ben Duncan

LAST summer there was a piece in the New York newspapers sayin' that August fourteenth was the coldest day known in them parts for forty-six years.

Now that just goes to show you how little that weather man knows. The temperature took a mighty big drop only a short spell before, right in the middle of the season for ice-cream cones, Coney

Island, and coonskin neckpieces for stylish women folks. It lasted eight days hand-runnin', and was noticed by all them as traveled out to Sheepshead Bay, on Long Island, to see "The Stampede." That was one gosh-awful frost.

What d'you mean—"stampede?" says you. Well, I reckon that's right; you didn't know there was such a show ever given. Seemed there was few people in and around Greater New York that did, while it was goin' on. I'll have to tell you, then, what the "spectacle," as the promoters called it in the advertisements, was.

It aimed to be a "real Wild West show," accordin' to them same ads. Indians, cowboys, and cowgirls, competin' at their fav'rite outdoor sports of bronco-bustin', rope-throwin', pony-racin', and "bulldoggin'," for cash prizes totalin' fifty thousand dollars.

Maybe you don't know what bulldoggin' means, either. It's the trick of gallopin' up alongside of a runnin' steer, grabbin' him by the horns, and leapin' out of the saddle to bring him to the ground by twistin' his head around so's his wind's shut off. The cowboy who sits on the head of his critter in the fewest number of seconds wins.

Excitin' to watch? You *said* it! There ain't no circus or movin'-pitcher stunt can compare with it for handin' the spectator a thrill. 'Cause he knows he's lookin' at somethin' that couldn't never have been rigged up beforehand nohow.

A "bulldogger," and a darned good one, was what my pardner, "Sandy" Darling, was. He'd come within three-quarters of a second of equalin' the world's record at the Laredo *rodeo* the year before. He'd seen in an issue of the *Cattleman's Guide,* that this stampede was goin' to be held near New York, and he'd framed it up with me that we'd save our wages all winter and come on to see if we couldn't grab some of them big purses that was offered for the winners of the different events.

I had Polly, my calico pony, that hadn't never been beat yet over any distance from a quarter up to two miles, to enter in the pony-race, and maybe win enough with her to keep me from worryin' over the price of chewin'-tobacco for a good long spell to come.

Well, to cinch the tellin' closer to the main facts, we arrived with our mounts at that discarded race-track a short ways outside the city limits along in the last part of July. We put in the next two weeks practisin' up on our specialties with the rest of the riders, fancy rope-throwers and the like, that had come from all over the West. Then the show started.

Sandy goes in, on the second day, to "bulldog" his steer so quick the judges, after their heads gets through whirlin' from watchin' the speed of his performance, will have to give him the first prize.

And he don't win. The steer he tackles turns out to have a streak of the Old Boy runnin' through it a yard wide. It takes him one minute and eleven and a half seconds to throw it, while the greaser who's been entered against him in the trial gets his down in twenty-eight seconds flat. Sandy comes off the field plumb heartbroke.

Me, I've got more luck, though. Polly makes a joke out of that pony-race, when I leans over and whispers in her ear with the crack of the starter's pistol: "Go and get me that money, old girl!" and gives her her head. The rest of them *caballeros* might just as well have stayed tilted back in their chairs in the shade against the side of a bunk-house as to have come all the way East to get themselves sweated up tryin' to outrun that little calico cayuse of mine. I could have told 'em *that* beforehand!

I'm on Easy Street then. That is, I will be when I collect that first prize.

Matter of fact, what with payin' the railroad fare for myself and Polly clear across the continent from Arizona, coughin' up the entrance-fee we all had to pay before we could compete in the show, and layin' out money for eats and a place to sleep, I'm pretty near flat broke.

I wouldn't have had but the loose change left out of a two-dollar bill if it hadn't been for somethin' that had happened right after that race was over.

A feller in a dustcoat and an automobile cap had come runnin' up to me from where the swells in their cars sat watchin' the exhibition. It seemed this party 'd never set foot inside a race-track that he hadn't come away with some of the bookmakers' money. That was because he's a judge of horseflesh, and not simply lucky, he'd been tellin' his friends.

They hadn't believed he knowed enough about horses to pick a winner by just lookin' at one. So he'd offered to bet a couple of thousands—a mere bag of shells to him—that he could point out the pony that was goin' to bring home the bacon in that race. He'd named Polly. And she havin' made good, he'd been so tickled he'd had to jump out of his buzz-wagon and shake hands with me.

After he'd got done pumpin' my flipper and hurried back to crow over his tony pards, I'd looked down and found he'd left a twenty-dollar bill crumpled up in my mitt.

When the show closed the followin' Saturday there wasn't no dough for me, or for none of the others that had won prizes. The stampede, like I said, had come and gone and not more 'n one person in ten thousand knowed it. There hadn't been fifty thousand dollars, nor nowhere near it, over and above expenses, took in at the gate.

The next day the management tells us the coin we've won is goin' to be dealt out to us. Then they tells us the settlement's goin' to be made on the next day, and when that comes around we're asked please to be patient and we'll all get our money on the *next* day, sure.

Nine-tenths of the bunch didn't have car-fare to Philadelphia left, let alone enough to get 'em back to Oregon, Texas, and them other far-away points they'd come from. They was a pretty blue crowd, take it from me. But the worst one of all was my pardner, Sandy.

He wasn't the cheerfulest-lookin' mortal you ever laid your eyes on, anyway. Six foot six in his socks, thin as a wire—but just as strong, you don't want to forget—it seemed like he'd been intended by nature more for the undertakin' trade than a seat on the saddle of a range-pony. But the expression of despairin' sadness that had settled down onto his face when he was put out of the runnin' in that bulldoggin' match, and that hadn't lifted once in a smile since, was somethin' to bring the sympathetic tears to the eyes of the hardest-hearted beholder.

'Twasn't that he cared so much about losin' the money he'd hoped to win, and without which he was goin' back to the Three-Bar ranch broke and a "sponger" on me for his railroad ticket out of the coin I'd won.

What had broke poor Sandy all up was bein' beat by a Mexican. Licked by a *greaser!* He couldn't get over that. Nothin' I told him provided any sort of balm for that wound.

"Tell you what let's do," I finally says to him. "For a month, now, we been talkin', eatin', and sleepin' nothin' but round-up stuff. Maybe a change of diet 'll make you feel better, and I know it will *me!* Here we are, only a trolley-ride away from the great metrollops of the East that we's been hearin' so much about all our lives. Let's go and give the city the once-over.

"Now, *don't* tell me you're broke," I pleads with him, as I see that melancholy look on his face crack in half as he opens his mouth to say somethin', "'cause don't I know it as well as my a, b, abs by now, from hearin' you tell me so at least four hundred times?"

I pulls out that twenty-dollar bill and passes it before his eyes, like the hypnotist when he's puttin' the subject into dreamland.

"Sleep, baby, sleep," I says. "Here's one night's forgetfulness, anyway, for what ails you. I'm game to blow all this in on showin' you a little of the high life you've been readin' about in them mag-

azines with the pretty-girl heads on the covers. I might as well be plumb busted as the way I am, so we won't come back till there's nothin' left of this yaller-boy but the mem'ries of a pleasant evenin' spent. I'm bound to get that prize money to-morrow, or the next day, anyhow. These folks 'll make good, just give 'em a little time. I ain't worried none about what's comin' to me."

It looked at first like I'd have to drag Sandy to get him to the city. He made me sick, and I told him so; talkin' about not wantin' me to blow in none of my cash on him. Wasn't him and me pards?

What I'd said about us needin' to get our minds off cowboy stuff for a while went double for him. I'd have spent twice as much as that twenty-dollar note if I'd had it, to try to make him quit grievin' over havin' lost out to that greaser, when it was nothin' but a piece of bad luck that had kept him from winnin'.

At last I got him to agree, in a half-hearted sort of way, to come along with me. Folks must have thought, from lookin' at his face on the train, that he'd just come from layin' some dear relative away in the fam'ly plot.

Lookin' around, when we hit Broadway, for a good place to go for a big feed before we took in a theayter, I spotted a place a few doors down on the nearest side street that had a sign runnin' across the front of it that said " Sea Food."

I knowed Sandy'd never seen an oyster any more 'n I had, so I figured the sight of a few on the half-shell might cause at least part of that cloud-bank of sorrow on his face to roll away.

We went in, and I ordered a dozen apiece for a starter, till we found out how we liked 'em. There was about a dozen different kinds down on the bill-of-fare, and I'd put my finger on the ones that went by the name of " Lynnhavens " —about as big as the palm of your hand, they turned out to be. We had two dozen more each after that, they was so good, and then one more round.

By that time, eatin' seemed to both of us to be about the most useless of human habits. We didn't order nothin' else, but come out on the street again and headed for a show.

The piece—I ain't never found out to this day what it was—was goin' on when we walked down the chute behind a bare-headed young feller who was wearin' his military-academy uniform.

I'd told the he-blond that was workin' out a sentence in the cell at the front of the theayter to give us good seats, and never mind the expense, and he'd done so. They was on the end of the row that was only three away from the stage.

We hadn't no more'n bent our legs when I got a poke in the ribs from Sandy.

I look up on the stage where he's pointin'. There, in a yaller circle of light, is a feller dancin' through the loop of a lariat, all togged out in a cowboy's outfit!

He was chewin' gum and crackin' jokes all the while. I guess they was right funny wheezes; the folks all around us was gigglin' and applaudin'. But me and Sandy, we just give each other one disgusted look. We wasn't in the mood to enjoy no jokes sprung by anybody wearin' spurs, chaps, squaw-made wristlets, and a knotted neckerchief—what we'd come away to get a rest from.

We picked up our hats out of our laps —where we'd had to hold 'em, them mouse-traps under the seats not havin' been built big enough to take in the wide brim of a Stetson—and walked back up the runway and out into the free air.

I stole a glance at Sandy's face out of the tail of my eye, as we stood on the corner. Just as glum and forlorn-lookin' as ever, he was. And nothin' to wonder at in that. I hadn't showed up as such a terrible hit as an entertainment committee of one.

Then my own face lighted up.

" Come on," I says to him. " I'll shoot you a game of pool!"

The half-open windows on the second floor of a buildin' across the street had a couple of crossed cues over a triangle

made of two white balls and a red one painted on 'em; and from that, and the green-shaded lights I could see through the raised window-sashes, it looked like we might not have farther to go than a couple of hundred feet to get into a place where we could have some fun.

You rode up in an elevator to reach this emporium of the iv'ry balls and green-felt-covered tables. When me and Sandy stepped out of the ostrich's cage, our feet sunk up to the hocks in a carpet that was laid down all over the floor of the place. *Some* swell pool-room, all right, this was!

A darky in a starched jacket comes hustlin' up to us and asks:

"Pool or billiards, gentlemen?"

"Oh, we'll teach 'em to find their way into the pockets, I guess," I says, frisky-like. But the dinge don't get me. "Pool!" I barks at him.

He's startin' to lead us to a table that ain't workin', when Sandy drives that lean elbow of his into my slats again.

"For the love of Sweet Nell, come out of here!" he whispers.

I look around at him, startled, and see him noddin' at a sign that's hangin' in a frame on the wall. I read it. It says: "Pool, $1.20 per hour."

"Hey!" I calls to the coon. "Is that statement up there to be credited by the human mind? The tax for pool-playin' in here is one-twenty an hour—two cents a minute?"

"Yes, sir," he tells me.

I turns to Sandy.

"You don't see no table here you like well enough to buy on the instalment plan on them terms, do you?" I asks him. "Then let's beat it—before they soak us at the rate of a cent a second for breathin' the rarefied atmosphere of this place!"

Outside on the street once more, Sandy reaches toward where the breast-pocket of his flannel shirt would have been if he'd had it on, 'stead of the store one he's wearin' the same as me. 'Cept for our Texas hats, our clothes ain't so much different you could notice it from them that's on the men passin' to and fro along the sidewalk in front of us; we havin', of course, left our Wild West duds behind us when we set out to take in the sights of the city.

I know he's gropin' for the makin's of a cigarette, and when I hears him heave a sigh, that's more like the groan of the condemned when the turnkey comes to tell him the electric chair's ready, and see him drop his hand back to his side, empty, I'm wise that he's come away and forgot his sack of alfalfa and papers, or he's run out of even the money to buy any.

And, dawgone it, when I dive into my pocket to haul out mine and offer 'em to him, I find I've gone off without my bag and book of papers, too!

There's a cigar store handy, only a couple of steps away from where we're standin', though, and I steers Sandy into it. While the clerk's waitin' on a customer at the other end of the counter, I looks down into the show-case and spots a box of seegars that's labeled: "One dollar each."

Maybe, I thinks, one of them millionaire smokes stuck between his teeth will make Sandy feel like he's out on a holiday, even if there ain't been nothin' happened to make him noways aware of it.

When the clerk comes along, I throws a five-spot down, carelesslike, on the glass, and tells him to take a couple of them one-dollar weeds out of it.

Then me and Sandy passes out, stoppin' to light up in front of the store. I'm just throwin' the match away when I hear a voice at my elbow say, soft:

"Good evenin', friends!"

It's this customer that had been gettin' waited on ahead of us when we'd gone into the place and that's followed us out, it seems, for the purpose of gettin' acquainted.

He's a slim little feller, with black hair and an olive skin, and a pair of eyes like shoe-buttons that's got a trick of wanderin' away all the time from the party he's talkin' with.

"You seem to be strangers in town," says he. "Are you lookin' for a little entertainment?"

I drops my hand on his shoulder—at which he jumps like he'd heard a diamond-back rattle.

"Old-timer," I says, "*now* you're talkin'! Entertainment is what we've been huntin' for high and low in this city of yours, but which we ain't had no sort of luck to date in findin'. Do you know where there's some kind of lively doin's that a couple of strangers could participate in—or do you even suspect it? If so, speak — shoot — slip us the answer. You'll never have no more appreciative audience than what's before you now."

The sallow-complected shrimp, lookin' relieved, opens up his mouth on a set of teeth that's formed the same as a beaver's, in a smile.

"Entertainment, mixed with a little profit?" he suggests.

I don't get his drift right away, which he sees from the look on my face.

"How'd you like to try your luck at roulette, faro, craps, or a game of poker?" he asks. "There's a place right near here that I can take you to, if you feel like gamblin'. There's no danger of its bein' raided while you're in it, if you've got fair names to worry about. It's a gentleman's club that the police can't bother. But I'll guarantee that you can get a roll there for as high as you like. I'm a member, and so I can introduce you, if you want to give a twist to the tiger's tail."

Well, this listens good to me—the poker part of it, leastways. I turn to take a slant at Sandy to see if there's any signs of an awakenin' interest in him.

There ain't none. My pard's lookin' off up the street like as if he was all alone in Death Valley — and about given up hope of any rescue party's reachin' him in time.

I takes his silence for assent to the proposition that we go somewhere and see if we can coax a smile or two from the fickle goddess. I've got ten bucks left out of that twenty-dollar bill, and that may allow of Sandy and me's sittin' into a card-game for an hour or two, if we have luck.

"Lead the way to this gilded palace of sin," I says to the little dark-faced feller, hookin' my arm through Sandy's, "and we'll be charmed to meet these clubmates of yours and maybe strip the hide off 'em with the pateboards!"

It's a brown stone house, standin' midway of a side street five or six blocks away, that he takes us to. From the looks of the outside there's nobody livin' there, and hasn't been for a long spell.

But when we get inside — three long and two short knocks on the front door by the whittled-down party causin' it to be opened about an inch and a half by a lanky person without no more color in his gaunt face than there is to a paper bag, who gives us the up-and-down, and then swings the door back wide enough to let us file through it—when we're inside, I say, we see that the place is lived in, all right.

It's fitted up right rich and sumptuous-like. Pictures on the walls in shadow-box frames, and statues standin' around in odd corners, with rugs down on the floor that 're each one thicker 'n four or five Navajo blankets laid together, and must 've cost no small bit of money, and a soft light prevailin' over all from a cluster of electric bulbs that's hung from the ceilin' in a red-glass shade.

"This way," says the little feller.

Liftin' the plush curtain that's hangin' in front of the open doorway of the room nearest to the front door on the right-hand side of the hall, he's beckonin' us to follow him.

Me, I know we've turned into the wrong stall. With only ten dollars on us, me and Sandy'll be able to last just about half as many minutes in any game we sit down to in this "gentleman's club."

I'm on the point of tellin' him that the gamblin' fever's died out in us, and we'll bid him a pleasant "Good evenin'" and travel on about our bus'ness once more—

when I see the curtain fall, shuttin' him from view.

It'd be downright non-civil, I figger, to walk out of the place without tellin' the feller who's gone to the trouble of bringin' us there that we're goin'. So, with my arm still hooked through Sandy's —that same look of total uninterest in his surroundin's draped on his long, thin map, as if it had been stone and carved there—I heads in through that doorway to make our excuses for beatin' it to the little feller with the saddle-leather complexion.

There's about forty or fifty men in the room. Some of 'em's wearin' the open-face suits you see at both afternoon and evenin' performances on the feller who does card-tricks on the vawdevil stage. They don't look up, nor otherwise pay no attention to us, when we appears.

Them that's hoverin' over the roulette wheel is too much interested in the antics of the little ball. The same thing goes for the smaller knot in front of the faro layout that's operatin' in one corner of the room, and for the still smaller set that's rollin' the bones at the craps table.

I sees the feller who's steered us into the place talkin' to a hearty-lookin', bald person on the far side of the room, and I tries to catch his eye.

For a minute or two I don't have no luck doin' it. He's that earnest in the talk he's givin' that party he don't look our way no more 'n the rest of the push in the place. Then he spots us standin' just inside the door and hustles over.

He's got the stoutish, hairless-headed gent in tow.

"This is the president of our club," he introduces him to us. "Seein' as how you're both friends of mine, he's willin' to suspend the rules against non-members placin' a bet here, and let you have a whirl at any game you're a mind to try. Poker, you said, didn't you, was your preference?"

"It was," I says.

And with that I digs down into my pocket to bring up our sole capital, intendin' to show it to him as the reason why we can't stay in a swell place like that—the truth bein' the easiest and quickest way out of the thing, I've figured.

"No, no!" speaks up the fleshy party with the decolltay dome, smilin' very genial-like and friendly, and holdin' up one fat hand with a four-carat di'mond shootin' sparks from the pinky finger. "Another one of our rules, which we can*not* break in your case, is that no chips are ever paid for here before you play. You draw them from the banker, who jots down the amount, and when you are ready to pull out of the game you settle up—that is, if you have been so unfortunate as to lose. It's just the same as if you was playin' among friends. That's the purpose of the club: To afford a place for gentlemen with sportin' blood to meet and give that blood a chance to circulate, without the fear of bein' interfered with by the police."

Well, thinks I to myself, friendly game or not, this is the first time ever I heard of any parties bein' let to take a hand in it without first showin' the color of their money. Leastways unless they was mighty long and close friends, which neither me nor Sandy is with none of them present.

It'll maybe offend the president of this here club, whose cheerful looks and pleasant-spoken way has already made me take a shine to him, if we tell him we guess we don't want to flirt with chance none there. And what's the harm if we sit in for as long as our ten lasts?

"Right this way," says the little feller who's brought us there.

He leads me and Sandy into a smaller room that opens off the main one. There's three fellers sittin' around a table in there playin' draw-poker like they wasn't much interested in what they was doin'—which you couldn't blame 'em for, a three-handed game bein' mighty slow sport. We're introduced, and I tells Sandy to draw up a chair and get into the game with me for just a couple of

hands or so, which is all, I announces to the others, we've got time to play.

But Sandy says he don't feel like gamblin'. He tells me that ain't to interfere none with my enjoyment, though. He'll just sit down alongside of me and watch my hands.

The first one he sees me pick up has two pair, aces and trays, in it.

There's a stack of chips been shoved across the table to me by the feller who's doin' the bankin' for the game. I judge it's worth about five dollars—bein' the same size, anyway, as the ones I've been accustomed to gettin' for that amount of money in the Happy Hour bar back home. I slides a couple of red ones off the pile and cracks her open with 'em.

I win that pot, without havin' bettered on the draw. Then I win the next, on a low straight that's dealt to me pat. The next hand I stay out of, not havin' even a pair of deuces. But the next pot, which is the fourth one, I win, too.

I got twice as many chips in front of me by that time as the banker 'd give me on credit—followin' the rule of the club.

I pick up my fifth hand—which is dealt by the shorty with the dark skin, who'd set into the game with me, makin' it five-handed — and there's three fat kings in it. I calls for two, and picks up the fourth king!

The little feller deals himself two cards, two. And then—

It all happened in the twinklin' of an eye. Sandy leaves his chair beside me. He leaves it the way a skyrocket leaves the ground—*swis-s-sh!* Grabbin' that small person with the shiftin', beady-black eyes by both ears, he jerks his head around sideways, topplin' him back out of his chair onto the floor, where my pard sits on his head.

"Buck," he says to me, without no partick'ler excitement in his voice, "come here and take the poker hand he's just dealt himself away from this party. You'll find there's six cards in it—one more than the law allows. I see him slip that extra card off the bottom of the deck just now. That's correct, ain't it? He's holdin' four aces—enough to trim you?

"All right, then," he says, gettin' to his feet and droppin' one hand back on his hip as he looks around at the three other fellers that 're sittin' at the table with their eyes and their mouths wide open. "Since we've showed up this game to be crooked, I guess there won't nobody here start no argument against your cashin' in them chips in front of you and walkin' out of here with me."

"Don't pull that gun, mister!"

It's the stout, bald party who's runnin' the joint that begs Sandy not to draw the weapon he thinks, from where he sees his hand restin', he's carryin'—which, as a matter of fact, he ain't. Havin' heard the commotion, I suppose, he'd come in to investigate.

"Pay 'em," he orders the banker, moppin' his forehead with a hand that ain't none too steady. "There 'll be no trouble about your leavin' here," he tells Sandy, "if you don't make it. Which I asks you, as a favor, not to do, on account of the rest of the crowd outside there."

I see Sandy shove my chips over to the banker, who gives him some bills. And the next thing I know—bein' dazed from the speed with which all these things has happened — we're out of the house and walkin' up the side street toward Broadway.

"Here's what you win," Sandy says.

I looks down at the bills which he shoves into my hand, and my eyes sticks out a couple of inches. There's an even five hundred dollars in the roll.

"Why—why, this can't be right!" I stutters. "I hadn't no more'n doubled that stack of chips I drawed when I sat down. And it couldn't have been worth more'n five dollars—"

"Five hundred," Sandy corrects me. "That was what it would have cost you, after you'd lost it. Which you was sure goin' to do, after they'd jollied you along by lettin' you win them first three or four hands. I been doin' some thinkin', and

the reason you wasn't allowed to pay for them chips at the start was so's you wouldn't know how much you was gamblin' for, and play recklesslike."

"But, hold on!" I says. "Where did they get off to trust me with five hundred dollars' worth of chips? We don't neither of us look like we was millionaires—"

"You made it seem like we was," Sandy cuts in again, "by buyin' them two seegars for a dollar a throw. I reckon it was seein' you order 'em up so free and easylike that made that gamblin'-house steerer take us for a pair of miners from the West who's just struck it rich, and figger he and his crowd could trim us for a bunch of dough."

I grins, foldin' up them yaller-backs and rammin' 'em down good and secure into my hip-pocket.

"Which is what we've done to them instead," I says. "Thanks to you, Sandy, that is. I'm sure much obliged to you—"

"No, you ain't!" he checks me up.

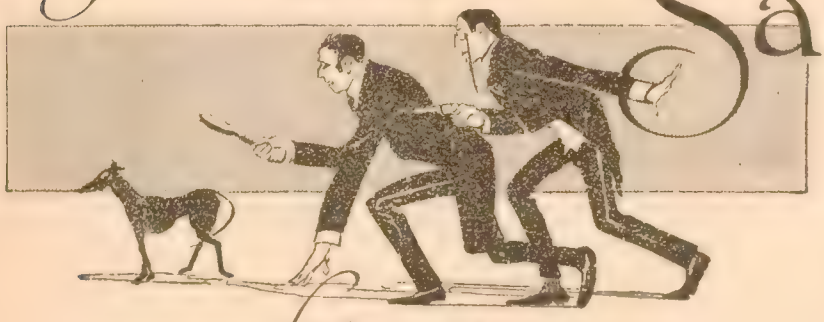
There's somethin' in his voice that make me look around at him. And darned if he ain't ackshully *smilin'!* It's the first time in all the eight years I've knowed him that ever I seen anythin' even approachin' a look of pleasure and contentment on his face.

"You ain't half so much obliged to me as I am to you," he goes on. "And I'll tell you why: You've give me a chance to redeem myself. I had to grab that shrimp quick, before he could get rid of that extra card he'd helped himself to, in order to prove he was cheatin'. I bulldogged him in pretty close to world's record time, even if I am more used to handlin' a longhorn than a shorthorn!"

That happy grin widens on his face.

"You noticed how dark-complected he was, didn't you? I'd like to believe, Buck, that there was greaser blood in him. What do *you* think?"

The Search for Sallie



by Neil Moran

I.

THE crack of ivory balls sounded through the billiard-room of the Idlers' Club. Four young fellows in evening clothes were gathered around one table, while a number of others looked on.

Stockbridge poised his cue. Everybody watched closely. Stockbridge was the star player of the club, but for the past hour he had been playing off.

Suddenly he drew himself up from his crouching position, and stared around the room.

"Your shot, Phil," Truesdale re-

marked. "Come along, old man, a little speed."

Stockbridge threw his cue on the table.

"I can't go on," he apologized. "Boys, I'm tired of this confounded game."

"You're not going to quit, Phil?" Plympton exclaimed. "Why, man, you'll get your stroke."

Tommy Lean picked up the discarded cue. "Here, Phil, chalk up a bit, and—"

Stockbridge waved it away. "No, I'm through, Tommy. This game is too monotonous."

"What do you want to do?" Truesdale asked.

Stockbridge's face became suddenly animated. "I want excitement, boys, Something to make my heart bound, and pulses beat."

The others looked at him, and then at one another.

"Excitement?" remarked Truesdale seriously. "Never heard of such a thing."

"That's just it," Stockbridge declared, bringing his fist down on the table. "Life to us is just one game after another. Billiards, dances, theaters, supper parties, cabarets, and — well whatever money can buy."

"But where do you expect to find excitement?" demanded Truesdale. "Say the word and we'll blow over to some restaurant and have a party."

Stockbridge did not answer. He had picked up an evening paper and stood staring at a story on the front page. It was about some mystery or other, and his eye caught the word "detective."

Suddenly he threw down the paper and banged the table again. "Boys, I have it. I'll be a detective."

For a second there was a deep silence, and then the room echoed with laughter.

"Lock the doors and search him," gurgled Tommy Lean. "Fellows, he's been taking dope."

With serious face Stockbridge listened to the uproar.

"When this outburst of mirth is over," he quietly remarked, "I'll outline my plan."

"Oh, Mr. Sherlock Holmes," shouted Truesdale, "somebody stole my heart. Please get it back."

"Be quiet, you idiots," Stockbridge demanded, "cut the kidding and be serious."

"And people will say," Truesdale went on as he turned and addressed the entire room, "there goes the celebrated Stockbridge."

The laughter attracted the attention of players at other tables, who came over to find out what it was all about. Realizing that he had become an object of ridicule, Stockbridge gritted his teeth.

"I'm going to make good," he said, his eyes blazing. "When I do, come and see me."

Hurriedly he left the room.

"There's Pearson," Truesdale said, grabbing Plympton's arm. "Let's tell Pearson, fellows, and have him put it in the paper."

Bob Pearson, society reporter, was instantly seized, and acquainted with Stockbridge's plan.

"He really said it?" he asked.

There was no doubting the chorus that shouted "Yes."

Pearson shook his head.

"It's a go, boys," Pearson announced. "It'll be something new for the society column, and, well, if Phil gets sore I'll send him a bill for the advertising."

The following night Stockbridge strode into the club with blazing eyes. In his hand was a morning newspaper.

"Well?" he demanded, looking around at the innocent expressions of his friends. "Whose work is this?"

Towering, he held up the paper.

"What is it about?" Truesdale asked, feigning surprise.

Stockbridge turned to the society page and pointed a finger. "Read."

Truesdale took the paper, glanced at Stockbridge, and then cleared his throat.

"It says: 'Mr. Philip Stockbridge, tiring of the monotony of a clubman's life, has decided to become a real detective.'"

The silence was suddenly broken by a peal of laughter.

Frowning slightly, Stockbridge removed another paper from his overcoat pocket.

"Well," he said quietly, "in this evening edition you will find my advertisement. I have opened offices in a Fifth Avenue building."

He tossed the sheet over to Truesdale, who read the advertisement, and then passed it on to the others. It stated that Stockbridge would make a specialty of society cases.

"So you're determined to carry this through?" Plympton asked.

Stockbridge nodded. "Positively. I'm no quitter."

Tommy Lean was reading the ad. "I say," he remarked, looking up, "you're all right, Phil. Have you bought a gun yet?"

This quip provoked another laugh, and Stockbridge clenched his jaws.

"I have an office boy," he quietly remarked. "To-morrow he'll be at the door in brass buttons."

"To-morrow?" exclaimed Truesdale. "Say, fellows, let's drop in and look over Phil's office."

Stockbridge nodded.

"Glad to have you," he replied grimly. "Get down early, though, as I open at nine and may have a lot of work."

"I say," protested Tommy Lean, "nine is devilish early. Suppose we make it eleven?"

The others agreed, and Stockbridge shook his head.

"All right fellows, eleven. And now, for my last night as a good-for-nothing clubman, I'll play one more game of billiards."

II.

Several minutes past eleven the following morning, Lean, Plympton, and Truesdale were ushered into Stockbridge's private office by an alert page in uniform.

Stockbridge was sitting at a mahogany desk, making believe he was busy by turning page after page of a novel he had been reading.

"Well, boys," he exclaimed, "what do you think of my little place?"

The "boys" presented a cheerful picture. They looked as though they were setting out for some morning social function, for as usual they were dressed with elaborate care.

Truesdale had a cane hung carelessly over his left arm, and every now and then would give it a friendly pat with his gloved hand.

Tommy Lean was wearing a white carnation in the buttonhole of his coat, fondling it occasionally as though it were some cherished object.

"Quite a place," commented Plympton, squinting his eye at several Charles Dana Gibson pictures on the wall. "I admire your taste, Phil."

Stockbridge followed his gaze toward the pictures and smiled. "Not quite appropriate," he laughed. "I intend to get one or two of celebrated detectives."

The door suddenly opened, and the boy appeared with a card in his hand. "A lady to see youse, sir."

Stockbridge looked surprised, and took the card. "Miss Cynthia Phelps," he read.

Carelessly, he ran his fingers over the lettering, making sure it was engraved.

"Who is the lady?" he asked, quite stupidly.

"Oh, a swell dame, boss," the boy hastened to answer. "Big hat, furs and—"

Stockbridge held up his hand. "All right, show her in."

The boy bowed, and disappeared through a door.

"Any of you fellows know a Miss Cynthia Phelps?" Stockbridge asked somewhat suspiciously, as he focused real detective eyes on his three friends.

All shook their heads.

"Perhaps we had better leave," Truesdale suggested. "We may be—"

But he stopped speaking as the door opened, and a young girl entered.

At first glimpse of her Plympton fixed his tie, Tommy Lean brushed his flower, and Truesdale twirled his cane.

Even Stockbridge ran a hand over his hair, for Miss Cynthia Phelps was decidedly attractive, and unmistakably young.

"Mr. Stockbridge?" she inquired hesitatingly, as she looked from one to the other.

"I am Mr. Stockbridge." And the amateur detective rose from his chair.

The girl looked fearfully around at the other fellows, who were doing their best to flash her smiles.

"I'd like to speak to you privately," she began, somewhat timidly.

Stockbridge looked first at her, and then at his friends who had found chairs, quite satisfied to stay a while.

Hearing the word "private," they reluctantly arose.

"It's about a case," she explained, "and—"

"It's all right then," Stockbridge cut in, glad to show off in front of his friends. "These men are my assistants."

The girl smiled, and took two newspaper clippings from her bag.

"I read of you through these," she said, placing them on the desk. "First in the society column, and then I saw your advertisement."

Stockbridge bowed, and the others had to grit their teeth to keep from laughing.

"I see, a case," Stockbridge remarked with a professional air, as he pulled up a chair for her. "Now, Miss Phelps, kindly tell me what it's about."

She became very serious when she had seated herself.

"The fact is," she began timidly, "my Italian greyhound Sallie has been stolen!"

A peculiar sound like the choking off of some imminent explosion issued from Truesdale's chair.

Plympton, trying to keep a straight face, began studying a scratch near the top of his cane, while Tommy Lean buried his nose in his flower to keep from laughing.

They had been anticipating murders, robberies, killing men, and all kinds of terrible and bloodthirsty crimes for Stockbridge's first exciting case. This was certainly tame. Finding a lost dog.

Even Stockbridge could not repress a grin.

"You see," Miss Phelps remarked as she smiled at the four men, "several weeks ago mother and I decided to leave California for the East. Mother remained behind to settle up some personal matters, so I came along and took a cottage in Garden City, where I met Mrs. Johnston Sills."

The four men suddenly looked at one another, and then at Miss Phelps.

All of them knew Mrs. Johnston Sills. She was in their set, and something of a society leader in New York and Newport.

"Of course, it's very delicate to explain," Miss Phelps resumed, "but I know in order for you to help me you must have the entire story."

Stockbridge nodded seriously, and the others drew their chairs a little closer.

"Well, Mrs. Sills took a fancy to Sallie, and wanted to buy her. Of course I refused to sell."

"Mrs. Sills is crazy about dogs," Truesdale remarked. "Ever see her kennels?"

"Oh dear, yes," laughed the girl. "She showed them to me the first day. Dogs seem to be her hobby."

"Well?" Stockbridge asked courteously.

"Mrs. Sills pleaded with me to sell Sallie," Miss Phelps went on, somewhat hurriedly, "and when I kept refusing, I really think she became somewhat angry. You see the Italian greyhound is a very rare species in this country. A man once told me that there are only three dogs like Sallie in the whole United States."

"Never saw one," remarked Plympton, twirling the end of his small mustache. "Anything like a bulldog?"

"Oh dear, no," laughed the girl. "Here's Sallie's picture."

She opened her hand-bag and tossed a photograph on the desk.

The four men looked at it. The best way to describe Sallie would be to imagine an ordinary greyhound reduced proportionally to miniature size. Sallie looked like a toy dog.

After the picture had been scrutinized with real detectivelike glances, Miss Phelps spoke with a trace of anger in her voice.

"I really believe that Mrs. Johnston Sills stole my dog!"

The four society men showed expressions of astonishment.

"What makes you think so?" Stockbridge quietly asked, as he arched his eyebrows, and proceeded to take notes on a paper pad.

"Because I saw her Japanese chauffeur skulking about our grounds. This was the other day. I can't say positively that he took the dog, but Sallie was around before he crossed my lawn. Afterward she was gone!"

"Anything else?" Stockbridge asked, as he made a note to watch the Japanese chauffeur.

The girl shook her head.

"That is all. I did not want to notify the police because, well, I didn't want anything unpleasant to come of it. That is why I've come to you. I feel sure that Mrs. Sills meant to get Sallie at any cost."

"Could Sallie have run away?" Stockbridge asked, as he tapped his pencil against the desk.

Miss Phelps shook her head. "No. Sallie would always stay around the house."

Stockbridge reached into a drawer of his desk and produced a small engagement book. Hastily he turned over a few pages.

"To-day is Tuesday," he said, turning to his friends. "Thursday night I'm booked for Mrs. Johnston Sills's dance in Garden City. Any of you fellows going?"

All of them nodded affirmatively.

"I was invited before Sallie was stolen," Miss Phelps remarked frowning, "but I just won't go. I'd give anything to get my dog back."

Stockbridge rose.

"Rest assured that we shall do our best, Miss Phelps," he said. "By Friday I hope to have a report."

The girl got up and started for the door. Plympton, Truesdale, and Lean made a dash to open it, but Stockbridge beat them to it.

"Good-by," she said, smiling at all of them, "and please try to get Sallie back."

"We will," came four voices. Then the door closed, and she was gone.

There followed a minute of excited conversation in the office of Philip Stockbridge, private detective.

Strange to say most of it was not of Sallie, but about the fascinating Cynthia Phelps.

"Well, boys," Stockbridge remarked, "my first case. A dog, a pretty girl, and a society leader. Now, do me a favor and say nothing about it."

Truesdale twirled his cane.

"I say, Phil," he burst out suddenly, "let me in on this."

"And me," chirped Tommy Lean. "That girl is certainly—"

"Well, if you let them in you'll have to take me, too," declared Plympton.

"Wait a minute," Stockbridge cut in. "What's the idea? This is my case."

"But you said we were your assistants," Truesdale reminded him. "Now make good."

"I had to say something," Stockbridge replied. "Now I'll bet you fellows will go and spoil this for me."

"We will if you don't take us in with you," Truesdale declared firmly.

For a second Stockbridge looked at his friends. One could expect almost anything from this trio.

"Very well," he finally said, "but remember, I'm the chief. We're all going down to this dance and we'll have a chance to look around. No one make an accusation, because that is dangerous. Later I'll give instructions."

The others nodded, and Stockbridge walked over to his chair and sat down.

"Boys," he said, puckering his brows with the air of some renowned sleuth, "this is my first case and we have to make good. We must get that dog."

III.

At eight o'clock Thursday evening Stockbridge sat alone in his apartment, doping his moves.

Truesdale was the first to arrive. He greeted the "chief" with a firm hand clasp, and then reached into the hip-pocket of his evening clothes and tossed something heavy on the table.

Stockbridge picked it up, and smiled.

"A gun," he muttered. "What's the idea, Archie? This is a dog hunt, you know."

"I know." And Truesdale shook his head wisely. "But I'm not taking any chances with that Jap."

Plympton was the next to arrive. After Truesdale's gun Stockbridge was not surprised to see that Plympton was carrying an electric pocket-torch. He flourished this impressively, using Truesdale's white shirt for a dark alley, which he immediately proceeded to illuminate.

Stockbridge looked on with an amused air.

"You fellows are certainly great," he laughed. "Why didn't one of you bring a blackjack?"

The hall bell rang again and Stam, Stockbridge's manservant, passed through the room to open the door.

Presently the shrill blast of a whistle sounded in the hallway, and then the generous form of Tommy Lean appeared.

Tommy had a police whistle in his mouth, which he was blowing with all the fervor of an assaulted citizen.

"All we need now is a patrol wagon," remarked Stockbridge. "Well, men, are we ready?"

The other three saluted.

"But aren't you going to take a gun or something?" gasped Truesdale.

Stockbridge shook his head. "The book on how to become a detective says it's much easier to catch a dog with a piece of meat than with anything else. Hide those weapons, and let's start."

It was considerably after ten o'clock when Stockbridge's limousine started up the drive to Mrs. Johnston Sills's impressive dwelling.

The boys had received their instructions from Stockbridge. Everything was to be done quietly, and with the utmost caution.

Five minutes later they were mingling with guests in and about the house, dancing now and then, or carrying on light flirtations with some of the season's débutantes.

From the easygoing manners of the men one would never suspect the mission they were on.

But Truesdale's gun, which weighed down his hip-pocket in no light fashion, continued to remind him of a pretty girl, a small dog, and a sinister looking Jap.

After several dances the boys scattered.

Stockbridge, being the chief, took the grave responsibility of keeping the hostess, Mrs. Johnston Sills, under surveillance.

Truesdale had been instructed to find her French maid, Marie, and quiz her. The "chief" had suggested that maids knew more about some society women than their husbands did. Consequently, the maid might be induced to talk for a slight consideration.

Being familiar with the interior of the house, Truesdale set forth for the first floor. It was deserted.

Up-stairs he went. His heart beat a little faster as he spied Marie coming down the hallway.

With well assumed nonchalance he advanced to meet her.

"Good evening," he began pleasantly.

Marie, a pretty girl with dark eyes and hair, stopped and curtsied. "Good evening, *monsieur*."

Truesdale was racking his brains for something to say.

"It's a nice evening," he began, be-

lieving this was a splendid opening for what was to follow.

The maid, not accustomed to so much attention from a good-looking society man, blushed and shook her head.

"Beautiful, *monsieur*. The stars are magnificent."

"Yes," replied Truesdale, wishing the girl wouldn't glance at him with such a coy expression, "I say, have you seen anything of a dog around here?"

The girl looked up with a scared expression. Truesdale immediately judged it suspicious.

"A dog?" she repeated. "What dog, *monsieur?*"

"You know," Truesdale smiled at her. "A dog about so high." He illustrated by holding his hand about a foot from the floor. "An Italian greyhound," he went on, piercing her with narrowed eyes. "She answers to the name of Sallie."

The girl stepped back, a frightened look on her face.

"Oh, *monsieur*, you must not—"

Truesdale grabbed her by the arm. "Listen, girl, tell me and this twenty dollar bill is yours."

"I cannot speak, *monsieur*. Please let me go."

She pulled herself from his grasp, and disappeared through a door.

Truesdale stood looking after her. Slowly he took a pencil and pad from his pocket and wrote the following: "French maid knows more than she will tell."

Returning the pencil and pad to his pocket, he descended the stairs, and reached the ground floor in time for the next dance.

Meanwhile, Tommy Lean was prowling around the back of the house in search of the groom. Tommy, too, was familiar with the house and its grounds.

The groom occupied a small cottage to the left of the stables.

As he approached the place Tommy discerned the figure of a man sitting in front of the door. The flare of a match lighting a pipe suddenly illuminated the man's face.

"How do, Flack?" Tommy called.

The groom arose and peered ahead. Suddenly he recognized Tommy.

"Good evenin', sir. A nice evenin'."

Tommy nodded. "A bit warm inside," he explained. "Glad to get a breath of fresh air."

The groom respectfully remained standing.

"Sit down. I want to ask you something, Flack."

"Yes, sir."

"Have you any new dogs about the place?"

Tommy had purposely struck a match to light a cigarette to catch the expression of Flack's face. What he saw aroused his suspicions.

"Dogs?" replied the groom stupidly. "No new ones, sir."

"You don't happen to have an Italian greyhound?" Tommy put the question abruptly. "A small dog, Flack, called Sallie."

The groom gave a perceptible start.

"Oh-h, no sir. No such dog."

"Are you quite sure?" Tommy was studying the man closely.

"Quite sure, sir."

In the dim light Tommy could see that the groom was agitated.

For a second neither spoke. Flack had become a sphinx.

"Very well," Tommy finally remarked, "good night, Flack."

"Good night, sir."

Tommy swung on his heel and started for the house. On the porch he stopped and took a pad and pencil from his pocket. "Interrogated groom," he wrote, "acted suspiciously. Denies knowledge of Sallie, but believe he is holding back information."

Dropping the pad and pencil into his pocket, Tommy stole across the porch in real detective fashion. Quietly he opened the door and entered.

Inside another dance was under way. Tommy saw Stockbridge sitting alone, watching Mrs. Sills, who was speaking to an elderly woman with gray hair.

Tommy made his way to Stockbridge's side. He was about to speak when Stockbridge raised his eyes and flashed him to keep silent.

Tommy nodded and sat down several feet from the chief.

Suddenly Stockbridge turned, winked his eye, and nodded his head slightly.

Tommy winked back, got up leisurely, started to whistle and sauntered over.

"Anything to report?" Stockbridge asked in low tones.

Whispering, Tommy told about the groom.

"I thought so," muttered Stockbridge. "Tommy, the plot thickens."

IV.

It was around half-past eleven when Plympton, who had been searching the house from top to bottom for signs of the lost dog, suddenly conceived the idea to look over the kennels.

Why he or none of the others had not thought of this sooner, is not remarkable, inasmuch as the simple things are usually the last to present themselves.

Plympton was hoping that none of the others would get the same idea.

While he and the rest were under Stockbridge's orders, he knew well that whoever found the dog would want to restore it to its owner through Stockbridge, and take all the credit.

Like his friends, Plympton knew the lay of the land. To get to the kennels he had to pass the garage.

As he approached the place he noticed the door was open.

Carelessly he looked in, and his glance encountered the beady eyes of Kato, the Japanese chauffeur, who was sitting on a chair reading a book by means of an electric light.

In a flash Plympton deliberated. Should he pass on, or stop and question Kato?

Perhaps after all Sallie was not in the kennels, and inasmuch as the Jap was undoubtedly the one who had stolen her, the quest should have begun with him.

Kato kept looking at Plympton, and then his face relaxed into a sardonic grin.

"What make is that machine?" Plympton asked, pointing to a car at the left of the garage. "A Rolls Royce?"

Kato smiled and nodded.

"Good," he said, inclining his head toward the car, "veree good."

"Yes," Plympton replied as he entered the door. "By the way, have you seen anything of a dog?"

Instantly the Jap became alert. His dark eyes darted furtively from one car to another, then rested on Plympton.

"Dog?" repeated the Jap blankly. "What kind dog?"

"Oh, you know," Plympton declared as he saw the guilty look pass over the Jap's face.

"Honorable dog?" asked Kato, flourishing his arms until they assumed the dimensions of a Saint Bernard.

"Honorable dog," replied Plympton, "stolen by some dishonorable mutt."

"I no see." And the Jap shook his head sadly. "No, I no see no honorable dog."

Plympton walked a little closer to the chauffeur.

"An Italian greyhound," he hissed, "called Sallie."

The Jap jumped from his chair, his hands trembling. His eyes enlarged, and his breath came quickly.

Suddenly he became suave.

"No, meester," he said slowly, avoiding Plympton's eyes, "I know notheeng about honorable Sallee."

Plympton gave him one look, turned on his heel and left the garage.

"If that dog is not in the kennels," he muttered, "I'll choke that Mongolian until he cries for honorable help."

Crossing a driveway he looked back once to see if the Jap was watching. If Kato was on the alert he was well concealed, for he was nowhere in sight.

Plympton glanced at his watch. It was a quarter to twelve. Now or never was the time to get to the kennels.

The sound of music coming from the

house suddenly stopped, and a babble of voices and handclapping followed.

Reaching the end of the driveway, Plympton vaulted an iron railing and started across a meadow. He could see the dim outline of the kennels about two hundred feet away.

Suddenly he stumbled against something and fell over. The next second he was on his feet, flashing his pocket torch downward.

Then he uttered an exclamation of surprise. On the ground was a tiny dog-house, and the small form of Sallie lying in front of it, looking up into his face with wistful eyes!

Quickly he reached down and unhooked the dog from a chain. The next second she was in his arms.

"Well, old boy," Plympton laughed delightedly, "won't Cynthia be glad to see you."

Sallie trembled and brushed her head against his coat.

"Some detective, I am," Plympton went on, talking to the dog. "Those other fellows, Sallie, would never have found you."

Suddenly something cold pressed against Plympton's cheek. "Throw up your hands."

At the curt command Plympton swung around and flashed his torch. Truesdale stood before him, pointing his gun.

"I've got her, Archie," Plympton chuckled. "Gad, man, put down that gun. I thought you were the Jap."

Truesdale stood staring at the dog.

"We must get her out of here," he whispered. "Come along."

Silently they started across the meadow.

"Wait," Truesdale broke in. "Let's make a detour, and cut around the back of the garage. Phil's machine is parked near the left gate."

Plympton nodded, and tucked Sallie under his coat.

Like two burglars they took the short cut, coming out into a driveway without meeting any one.

With rapid strides they covered the short distance to Stockbridge's car. Barlow, the chauffeur, was slumbering at the wheel. Truesdale roused him.

"Get ready to start, Barlow. Mr. Stockbridge is coming."

Barlow touched his cap, and gave a twist to the wheel.

Truesdale shoved Plympton into the car.

"Stay there and I'll get Phil," he said, as he started for the house on the run.

Inside he met Stockbridge and Tommy.

"We've got Sallie," he whispered. "Plympton has her in your car, Phil."

Stockbridge looked surprised, and Tommy Lean whistled.

"Where did you get her?" Stockbridge asked. "And how—"

Truesdale grabbed his arm. "We'll explain later. You and Tommy get your hats and coats. I'll manage for Plympton's and mine."

An hour and a half later they were in Stockbridge's apartment. Sallie was fast asleep on a lounge.

"Well," Stockbridge announced, "tomorrow I'll return the dog to Miss Phelps. It's up to her if she wants to make it unpleasant for Mrs. Sills."

Plympton, about to light a cigar, tossed away the match. "Hold on, Phil," he said. "You say you're going to return the dog to Miss Phelps. You forget I found Sallie, and—"

"I was going to say something about that," Truesdale cut in. "I helped to get Sallie to the machine."

"Well I did my share, too, if it comes to that," declared Tommy Lean. "Why not let me return Sallie to Miss Phelps?"

Stockbridge looked at his friends with narrowed eyes. "Listen, boys. Surely you're not going to deny me the privilege of restoring Sallie to—"

"But I found her," shouted Plympton. "I'm the one—"

Stockbridge held up his hand.

"I see. Just what I thought. You fellows want to do me out of my first case. We all can't return her, and rather

than have talk about it, we'll draw lots to see who'll take the credit for giving Sallie back to her owner."

The others nodded, Plympton somewhat reluctantly, and apparently annoyed. Stockbridge took a pack of playing cards from a drawer of the table.

"Ace is high," he said. "Whoever pulls the highest card returns the dog."

Truesdale reached over and drew.

"Ten of hearts," he muttered. "That's fairly high."

Tommy Lean drew the seven of spades.

"Let's you out, Tommy," Stockbridge said. "Now, Plympton, you—"

"I'll draw last," Plympton remarked nervously.

Stockbridge nodded, and pulled a card.

"The queen," exclaimed Lean. "The queen of diamonds."

"A king or an ace to beat it," Truesdale muttered.

Stockbridge clenched his jaws, and looked nervously at Plympton.

Suddenly Plympton drew a card.

"He wins," shouted Truesdale. "He's pulled the king of clubs!"

Stockbridge bent over the table, staring at the card. "He wins," was all he said.

Dancing gleefully, Plympton picked up Sallie.

"To-morrow, Phil," he shouted, "I'll be at the office with the dog."

For a second Stockbridge looked at him, then he smiled.

"You'd better be in Garden City, or Mrs. Sills may have you arrested for theft."

"Theft?" ejaculated Plympton. "Why, she stole—"

"Oh, no she didn't," Stockbridge remarked quietly. "That's her dog!"

The others gasped. Stockbridge was regarding them with a tantalizing smile.

"Well, boys," he laughed, "some detectives, all of you. Oh, wait until the fellows at the club hear of this."

Tommy Lean had dropped into a chair, Truesdale sank on the lounge, and Plympton stood leaning against the wall, feeling a peculiar weakening in the knees.

"When you fellows ridiculed me that night in the club," Stockbridge resumed, quite elated with the surprise he had sprung, "I decided to get back. Knowing how susceptible you are to a pretty woman, I thought of Dolly Dart, a chorus girl, and for the small sum of fifty dollars she consented to be known as Miss Cynthia Phelps for one morning!"

Stockbridge paused, and a series of groans echoed through the room. Truesdale, Plympton, and Lean suddenly realized that they had been the victims of a well-laid scheme.

"I also thought of Mrs. Sills's new dog Sallie," Stockbridge went on, smiling at the worried looks of his friends. "Several weeks ago Mrs. Sills gave me a picture of Sallie, knowing that I was interested in dogs, and told me that she had instructed her servants to say nothing about Sallie because she wanted to spring her as a surprise in the dog show, which by the way opens to-morrow."

Stockbridge stopped to light a cigarette, and laughed.

"So you see, boys, I couldn't pass up the chance to send you around like fools to quiz the servants, knowing that they would act suspiciously and arouse your curiosity. I was a bit scared though, when I heard that Plympton by chance had found the dog, for it was not my intention that we should come away with her."

Stockbridge reached into his pocket and produced the reports of his "assistants."

"You did very well, boys," he remarked, as he looked over what Truesdale and Lean had written. "I shall keep these to show to the fellows at the club."

Again Stockbridge paused and smiled benignly.

"Any more questions?" he asked politely.

Plympton tucked Sallie under his coat and buttoned it.

"Yes," he said seriously. "When's the next train for Garden City?"

The Log-Book

By the Editor

A MERRY Christmas and a Happy New Year to you, readers. May your brightest hopes be realized when you look at your presents on December 25, and may 1917 bring you only good things. One of these, of course, will be THE ARGOSY, for I am sure if you are reading these lines you think enough of the magazine to wish it to come to you every month in the future as in the past. And how about *your* friends? Have you yet finished with that troublesome list that begins to bother you every year just as soon as the Thanksgiving turkey has been digested?

"What shall I give John?"

"How shall I remember Mary?"

A year's subscription to THE ARGOSY is one of the easiest things possible to send, as well as one of very big value for the money. All you have to do is to mail a dollar to the publishers with the request that they despatch a specially prepared card to the address you enclose, announcing that you have caused the magazine to be mailed there as a Christmas remembrance. As to the value? Well, did you ever place twelve copies of THE ARGOSY together, one on top of the other, and note the imposing height of the pile? Surely a great dollar's worth. In variety there will be twelve complete novels, a new serial starting every month or so, and a hunded or more short stories. And the quality: Stories of life as you know it all about you; of life in the wilds as you don't know it, but which has the power to thrill you as you read about it; stories of the climb against obstacles to success, and of the triumph of man over his own baser instincts. Stories, in short, that will not only keep you engrossed while reading them, but will make you the better for having read.

"SOUTHWEST OF THE LAW"

BY REX PARSON

the complete novel for January, is a fine example in point. *Bob Phillips* gets a dandy opening in the Brazilian rubber country, where he is to be trained to manage a camp of natives while the present incumbent goes on to found another supply-station for the product that is of such importance to the automobile industry. Now *Phillips*, while by no means a weakling, is not a brute, and it is more by brute force than otherwise that *Haggins* has ruled the domain. With *Haggins* gone, mischief begins, and the situation is made ten times worse by the arrival on the scene of a woman.

If this woman had been old and unattractive, there would have been no fresh trouble. But she wasn't either of these things, so you may easily guess what happens. But this will not prevent your wanting to read about the thrilling incidents

that occur when *Phillips* tries to keep peace where jealousy and intrigue, and no law but that of force, reign supreme.

And now, instead of telling you what serial will start in January, I will vary matters by setting down some striking titles of stories I have in stock for use during 1917. Whether they are long or short I shall leave you to guess for yourselves. I can assure you, however, that they are all lively yarns, purchased not because their authors were men of reputation, but solely because each particular story was so good that I wanted you and your friends to enjoy it with me. Only to-day, in fact, I sent back a novel written by a man who has done some of the best things you have read in these pages, but this particular story wasn't up to his mark, so it doesn't get in.

THE ARGOSY makes contracts with no authors, so never feels compelled to take inferior work because it would lose money by not doing so. The story, not the writer, is the thing. It was this policy that placed THE ARGOSY at the very forefront of the all-fiction magazines. In pursuance of it I am not mentioning the authors in connection with the subjoined list, although, of course, their names will appear with their stories when published:

Five Dreadful Nights
In the Blue Limousine
The Autoped's Prey
Side-Tracked at Green Gap
Tying It to Bunny
The Inherited Taint
Ladies Don't Count
The Other Side of the Curtain
Last Call for Help
In Honor of the Beast
The Car of Many Regrets
Playing the Man
Four-Forty at the Fort Pitt
The Undeserted Island
Cochrane Turns Bad Man
Clipping the Vampire's Claws
Why the Doctor Came
Doing for the Yap

TOUCHING QUALITY IN STORIES

It gives me great pleasure to print the subjoined endorsement of "Hello, Somebody!" the story with a peculiar charm we printed in the August number. My correspondent intimates that it was of a quality seldom seen in THE ARGOSY. How about "And After That," published last month? And I will ask him to watch out for "The End of the Game," to appear shortly. Understand that all our fiction is up to the standard of compelling intense interest on the reader's part; but some tales are of more delicate fiber than others. That is the class to which "Hello, Somebody!" belongs. And no one has knocked it. As to authors with names, Mr. Beach is referred to my remarks about next year above.

Caldwell, New Jersey.

Three months is all I can claim as a reader of THE ARGOSY, and yet I have become deeply attached to it. In your August issue the story, "Hello, Somebody!" was of a quality seldom seen in such magazines as yours. That issue was especially good, but all I have read are truly worth ten cents, and I assure you that not one story did I find that was not interesting. Even "Never Again" had a good plot, although I did not think much of the action. Do not think I am kicking when I say this, for it was worth reading just for the revelation made in the climax.

Regarding a letter in the Log-Book as to the attitude of editors toward new men, I do not believe they are partial, but I do believe that a man with a name is favored, for I have read some pretty punk stories by authors of reputation that I do not believe would have reached the press were it not for the author's name.

One who thinks THE ARGOSY as good as the best,

F. O. BEACH.

CONFESSIONS OF AN "ARGOSY" FIEND

In reply to G. W. A.'s statement about the anxiety of editors to tell who the authors are, I submit the list of certain stories for 1917, printed herewith, all minus the writers' names. It has never been THE ARGOSY's policy to play up these. As to serials, the magazines of largest circulations are those that run them, so it stands self-evident that they must be the preference of the majority.

Madison, Indiana.

Honest criticism is not considered a knock, so I will contribute my little mite to your Log-Book. The supposed-to-be criticisms published by you from some of your subscribers are a joke.

I have read THE ARGOSY for years, though I never subscribed, and I will say truthfully that I am no lover of serial stories. Who would like to eat a meal on the instalment plan? Would you like to see a baseball game played part to-day and part to-morrow? A serial is of no advantage to any one but the publishers, leaving a story off at an exciting point with the purpose of having the reader get the next copy. The most joyful reading event in my ARGOSY existence was when the serials were displaced by complete novels, and the most depressing, when they were resumed. But I am an ARGOSY fiend, and stuck on the job, for I thought the majority of readers preferred the serials or you would not have changed.

Regarding the names of the authors, I always look at them first. If readers pay no attention to who the writer is, why is it that publishers and editors are so anxious to tell who the writers are? Why do writers for the Log-Book tell who their favorite writers are, when any one of them could tell better what stories they liked best? I thought a little change in the order of the Log, taking a shot at the writers in the same and giving the editor a rest, would prove more advantageous than continually finding flaws.

I am an ARGOSY admirer first, last, and always, whether you print serials or not, whether you tell the writers names or not, or whether you advance the price to twenty-five cents. You can read this, then burn it, tear it up, or print it to suit yourself.

G. W. A.

"ONE-CYLINDER SAM" GOT HIM

What story "got" you, reader? Just think, for every one of you there must be in the back of your mind the memory of the first story you ever read in THE ARGOSY that made you want to become a regular purchaser. I wonder how many other families have solved the problem of getting at the new number quickly, as it has been done by the Marshalls.

New York City.

At last I am writing a few words of praise for THE ARGOSY. A copy was handed me by a friend. "One-Cylinder Sam" got me a year ago. Since then, being one of a family of twelve, I could not get THE ARGOSY quick enough, as every one wanted to read it at the same time. And I never could find it even when I had bought it. Now we have several ARGOSYS on board each month. No knockers in the bunch.

W. G. MARSHALL.

WANTS THE SHORT STORIES SHORTER

Mr. Smith cannot fail to be delighted with Mr. Cain's new story, starting this month, "The Gilded Trap." Although he thinks that no short story should cover less than six pages of the magazine, he singles out for special praise "The Silencing of Joshua," which was not quite two in length. But I am very glad to have his letter, and can assure him that whether the stories be long or short, I shall do my utmost to have them all superlatively interesting, which, after all, is the great end to be achieved.

Cleveland, Ohio.

I have been reading THE ARGOSY for two years, getting my copies at a news-stand each month, and the stories are great. "Over a Cliff at Point Firmin," by William Wallace Cook, was very good. Let us hear from him again soon. "Those Eyes from Karna" is good, so far. Keep George Foxhall busy, will you? I agree with Mr. Jones (September Log) that the short stories are truly a nuisance. The very shortest stories should cover not more nor less than six pages. Let us have something more from Eugene Jones and George M. A. Cain. Their stories are good. In fact, THE ARGOSY is very good this month, as far as I have read. I don't like to start reading stories that are continued from time to time, because the suspense of waiting for THE ARGOSY is very great.

OLIVER SMITH.

HOW THE NEWSPAPERS PLAY SAFE

A very good point is made by a man on a paper in British Columbia with respect to the realism in newspaper extracts in our October novel. I thank Mr. Wiedemann for the reminder, and beg to assure him that after this I shall watch my authors more closely when they turn headline writers. Incidentally, this comment shows how attentively THE ARGOSY stories are read.

Vancouver, British Columbia.

Far be it from me to say anything against your excellent publication as the best reading value in the United States. Also, I do not pretend to criticise that very able writer, Mr. Seward W. Hopkins, for his style of stories. He writes fine mystery yarns. On several occasions, however, as a newspaper man and former editor of my own publication, I have noted one very great mistake in these stories.

Take, in Chapter XX of "The Man-Hunt On Capitol Hill," two men are arrested for a murder. They have not yet been tried for that crime, aside from a preliminary hearing where they were bound over to the grand jury. Yet when one of them, *Parseman*, escapes from *Chief Detective Plimley*, a newspaper comes out with this very libelous heading: "Murderer of Señor Delgado Escapes from Chief Detective."

Mr. Hopkins should know that a paper would never dare to designate a man before a trial as a murderer. We protect ourselves by saying "alleged" or "suspected murderer." To do otherwise would surely mean a libel suit, or maybe worse, for any newspaper. As stated before, I have noticed this slip on other occasions, and thought that I would this time point it out to you. The story is fine, as are all Mr. Hopkins's stories, and I am sending this criticism in the hope that no more such mistakes are made

to slightly take away the interest from the story for others, like myself, in the newspaper game. I trust you will take this letter in the spirit in which it is sent.

THOMAS WIEDEMANN.

WARMING UP ON THE ARGOSY

"Read THE ARGOSY and keep warm." How is that for a slogan at this beginning of the winter months? It can be done. We have Mr. Bronk's word for it. I want to thank him for telling me how he started in as an ARGOSY fan. I trust many others will follow suit.

New York City.

I do not know whether my letter will be printed or not, but I hope it will, for I am a *booster for* THE ARGOSY. About four years ago I went to my uncle's in Jersey, and it was freezing cold. Well, I hunted around for some magazines to read when I came across a pile of ARGOSYS, for my uncle is a devoted reader of it. I started to read THE ARGOSY, and, believe me, I didn't stop until I finished the pile. The house was cold, because the steam heat wasn't up yet, but with THE ARGOSY and my pipe I forgot about being cold. And I was so anxious for next month's issue I could hardly wait for it.

From that time on I never missed a copy, for to me it is a necessity. I have no special author; all the stories are O. K. Don't mind the knockers, for they are few. There are more boosters than knockers. Good luck to you in the future.

NELSON BRONK.

WHY HE SAYS GOOD-BY

Now, having ladled out so much sweet, I'll sandwich in some bitter, just to make clear that I'm willing to give both sides a showing. By the bye, I'm wondering if the weather-eye of our friend (who requests that his initials only be signed) has glimpsed that this month's ARGOSY carries a novel about his own city. Well, here's for a roast:

Brooklyn, New York.

With the August issue of THE ARGOSY I will have rounded out six years as a steady reader. I have remained a strong supporter of your magazine up to now. I will buy the August issue just for luck, luck in the hope that the stories may improve. Before 1910 I had never read a magazine, but that year, while on my vacation, I was looking for something to read. A friend of mine had given me a few old copies of THE ARGOSY, and so, on looking over the magazines in the store, I chose THE ARGOSY and kept on reading it.

The stories at first were "pippins," being written by such writers as Frank Williams, Johnston McCulley, Edgar Franklin, A. P. Terhune, and many others. But lately the grade of stories has been going down, and still down, until at last I despair of ever reading another story in THE ARGOSY as good as when I first enlisted in its cause. And so I must say *adios*, but will always keep my weather-eye out for THE ARGOSY when she carries a good cargo, and if ever she does return to her old love, I'll be with her again.

B. F. A.

NOT A FAULT TO FIND

What more can an editor ask than a letter like the subjoined, in which the writer declares she hasn't a fault to find? One thing, yes—that these ardent admirers speak to their friends about the magazine or make a Christmas present of it.

Colonial Beach, Virginia.

I am an old subscriber to your fine ARGOSY magazine that I couldn't do without. The stories are all A No. 1, and I haven't a fault to find. The day, if ever, you cease to publish it will be a gloomy one for me, as your magazine has brightened many an hour.

MRS. HOWARD ROLLINS.

A LINK WITH THE PAST

Here's an instance of an old-time reader of THE ARGOSY, when it was a juvenile publication, taking it up again after many years and finding a new source of enjoyment in its pages. The first number of THE ARGOSY, I may say in passing, was issued in December, 1882. As Mrs. Smith is connected officially with a railroad company, I'll forgive her for placing *The Railroad Man's Magazine* first in her affections.

Saffold, Georgia.

I have been a reader of THE ARGOSY a few months only, and am much pleased with it. I will not say it is "the best ever," for I reserve that for *The Railroad Man's Magazine*, and ARGOSY comes next. I want to say a word in defense of Fred Jackson, as I see so many "knocks" directed at him. I have just read his "Diamond Necklace," and it is simply fine.

I have no "kick" on the serials, as I keep the magazine until the story is complete, and read as I would any book, while I prefer the book-length novel complete in a single issue. By all means continue the Log-Book, for I know the majority of your readers would dislike to be deprived of this entertaining department, from which we derive so much information and amusement. I read *The Golden Argosy* in my childhood, and one story I recall was "Barbara's Triumph," published more than thirty years ago.

MRS. M. E. SMITH.

ANOTHER OLD FRIEND WON BACK

I shall be glad to hear from this Brooklyn girl again, after she has read the novel in the present issue. Elizabeth York Miller has been for over half a dozen years a resident in London, where she writes serial stories for the big morning and evening newspapers of the English capital. I take it from her mention of Davis

that here is another admirer of "Hello, Somebody!" written by Leslie Davis for our August number.

Brooklyn, New York.

Are you glad to hear from a Brooklyn girl? Would like to express my appreciation of THE ARGOSY stories. The serials are very good, the short stories better, and as for the complete novels, I think they are great. Years ago, when I was a very young girl, I read THE ARGOSY. Was very ill at the time, but I could *read*. The pleasant stories of THE ARGOSY helped me to forget my sufferings, and for many months I continued to read it, anxiously waiting for the next month's issue. When I recovered, my school duties kept me engrossed, so I stopped reading it. That was eleven years ago.

A few months ago I purchased a copy of THE ARGOSY. Through the absorbing stories the old interest returned, and now I am a regular subscriber.

Many thanks for the pleasure your stories have given me. I am particularly interested in those stories written by Jackson, Hopkins, and Davis. "Over a Cliff at Point Firmin" was very good, I think. Of the old authors I liked Elizabeth York Miller and Bertram Lebhar, also the men who wrote "With Sealed Lips" and "From Flag to Flag."

L. M. C.

THINKS THE EDITOR KNOWS HOW TO RUN THINGS

Surely one cannot ask for a more modest correspondent than our Iowa friend, who frankly admits his inability to run a magazine. I infer from what he says about the kickers that he never finds any stories in THE ARGOSY that are not to his taste.

Fairfield, Iowa.

I have been a reader of THE ARGOSY for a good many years, and I never miss reading its whole contents. What I have been wondering is why the kickers read the stories they don't like. If I didn't like them, I wouldn't read them. I have no favorites. I take them as they come, and I think you understand the business of running a magazine well enough that you need none of my suggestions. So send it along with stories as good as the past, and you have one satisfied reader, at least. R. ANDERSON.

STRONG FOR JACKSON

With his work for the theater to engross him, Fred Jackson does not find opportunity to write as much for the magazines as before. "A Full House" made its hit. But he has a corking story "Young Blood," running in the *Munsey*. It began in the October issue, and I can heartily commend it to Mr. Pearce and other Jackson fans. Meanwhile they will find that Neil Moran, in THE ARGOSY, writes about the same sort of people as Jackson does.

Glen Allen, Alabama.

I am writing you in behalf of THE ARGOSY, of which I have been a constant reader for the last five years, and think it to be the finest magazine that I ever read. I sure do like to read the Log-Book about how people spend their ideas about Fred Jackson. I am a great admirer of Fred, and hope that he will continue writing for THE ARGOSY; and I also admire Hopkins, and think that he is a great writer. Hoping that this will miss the waste-basket.

F. E. PEARCE.

HIS REAL PAL

The letter I pick up next affords me an opportunity to say a few words more on one I printed last month. Mr. Evans suggested that one great story would make for him a perfect magazine. I fail to see wherein that would be a magazine at all. Note in this connection what our Philippine friend (a member of Co. D, 13th Infantry) remarks about variety. What do the rest of you say?

Fort Mills, Philippine Islands.

I have a great deal of time to devote to reading, and consequently read many magazines; but the favorite, the real pal, the one that is saved until the last, because the best is for me always the last, is THE ARGOSY. The only kick I ever make is when I am too late at the newsstand to get mine. Then is the time, the place, the cause, and consequently the kick.

Of the contributors to THE ARGOSY it is hard for me to decide on which is my favorite. They are all clean, wholesome, entertaining writers; they apparently know the characters which they are picturing, and their stories are not stories of improbable things and impossible people. Occasionally one of the very weird type creeps in, but no one except a simp or a boob would object to that. Variety is the spice of life. THE ARGOSY is variety personified. Therefore—nuff sed.

In conclusion I will say let THE ARGOSY continue as it is, because there is little room for improvement, and I would not be presumptuous enough to suggest any, as it is now, as it has always been, and as it will continue to be the "Big Variety Boss" of them all. They may pattern after, they may imitate, but they will never equal. P. J. W.

LOG-BOOK JOTTINGS

Walter W. Fraer, Corvallis, Oregon, in renewing his subscription, says that he has been a reader of THE ARGOSY since we used to have a "ship of gold" on the cover, and that it grows better. Otto E. Frankenbush, Chicago, declares that he never had as much enjoyment out of any magazine as out of THE ARGOSY and the *Munsey*. Mrs. Lamont Gold, Chester, Vermont, writes that she has not missed a number of THE ARGOSY since we bought the *Peterson Magazine* in 1898, and thinks that some of those old stories cannot be equaled to-day. Harry Sloan, Baltimore, regards THE ARGOSY as the best magazine for the money published. Is very fond of the complete novels, especially those like "Comrade Island" and stories of the North.

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By Dr. E. L. Abogado

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True, one so inclined can call in his physician, knowing that a dose of morphine will afford him temporary relief. But he also knows as does, too, the physician who administers it, that danger lurks in that insidious drug. And he is loath to take the risk.

To be able quickly and surely to relieve pain whether it be only a slight nervous headache or the most intense suffering from a severe neuralgia or sciatica, has always seemed to me to be the highest function of the conscientious physician. I have always avoided as far as possible the use of morphine. The practice of prescribing it for simple pains and neuralgias of different varieties cannot be too strongly condemned.

Now there is no question in my mind but that all men, all women who know pain would gladly welcome the means of obtaining relief if they but knew they could do so with a simple remedy. There should be such a means—and, as a result of most careful investigation, I am quite positive that there is.

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I think it should be made clear that no physician's consultation or prescription are a requisite for taking Anti-kamnia Tablets. You need no one to tell you when you are in pain or when you feel feverish. And it is by no means necessary to run to the doctor with your every ache and pain. Anti-kamnia Tablets, the pain specialists, at the corner drug store, will quickly give you the desired relief. They may be obtained in any quantity desired.

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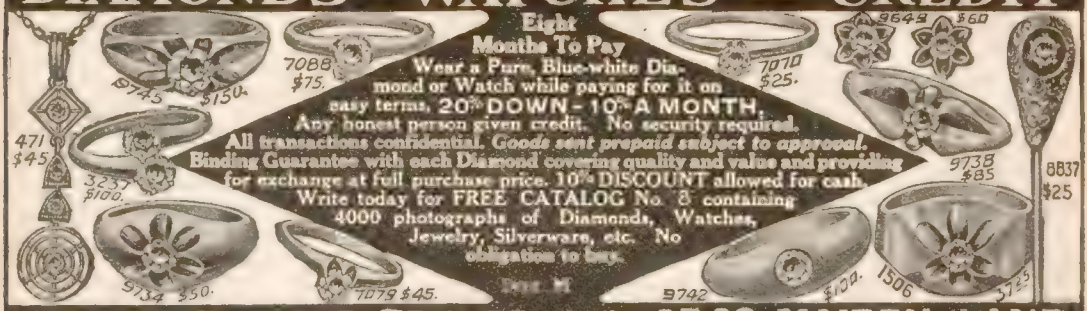
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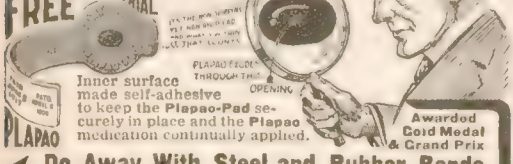
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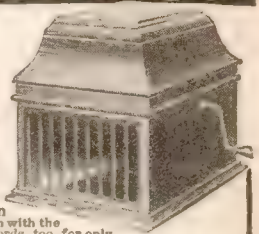

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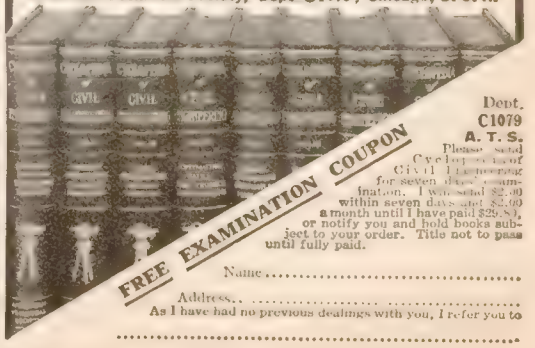

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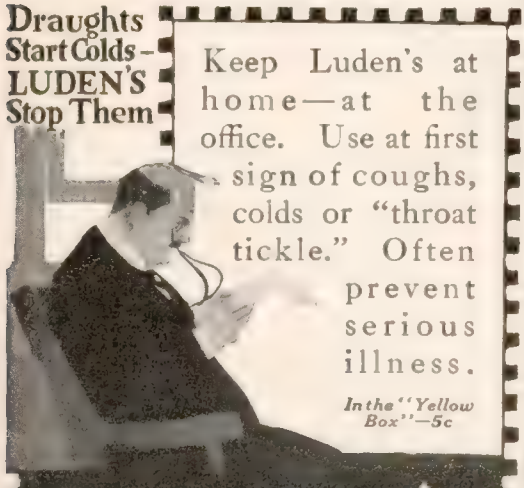

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ELECTRICAL ERA IN ROCKIES. (Illustrated)	Paul Steele	598
BUILDING A RAILROAD AT SEA. (Illustrated)	Warren Safford	611
OLD TIMES ON THE "G. N."	"J. E. M."	625
TALES FROM THE KNIGHTS OF THE RAILROAD ROUND-TABLE:		
Catching a Stolen Train	Charles S. Given	634
"Knot-Ankle" and the Rules	Charles L. Funnell	638
What Fear Can Do	Frank Kavanaugh	639
When the Whistle Failed	Percy Rees Russell	643
FOUR SEASONS IN NINE HOURS. (Illustrated)		647
MONEY "UP THE SPOUT"	C. H. Claudy	650
CANADA'S NEW R. R. EMPIRE. (Illustrated)	Thaddeus S. Dayton	661
THE COUNTRY STATION-AGENT. (Illustrated)	J. E. Smith	693
WORMS MAKE SCHEDULE RUN	Martin Wells	704

FICTION

THE JINX OF THE SHOW. (Illustrated)	William H. Seymour	589
THE SPOT ON THE DEPOT FLOOR	R. E. Carter	607
HE-HAW MIKE	Ellis Mackenzie	620
THE INVOLUTION OF MAHONEY	Fred Shaffer	656
HONK AND HORACE. (Illustrated)	Emmet F. Harte	673
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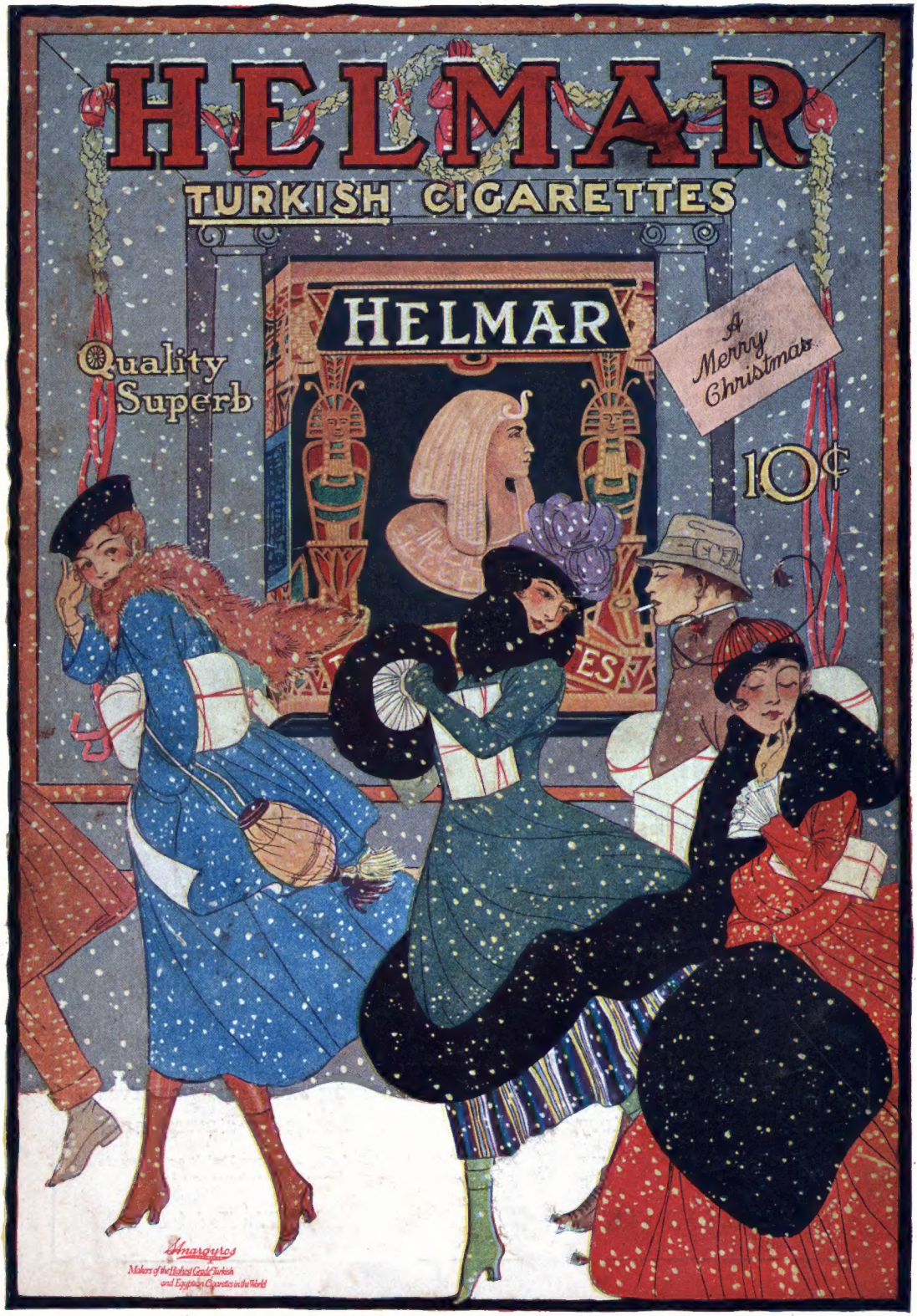

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